



# *Seeing a* Psychologist

A HELPFUL GUIDE TO PUT YOUR MIND AT EASE



INNER MELBOURNE CLINICAL

*psychology*



The tips given in the book are for guidance only. It's up to you as the reader to make an informed decision based on these tips as well as other research you conduct.

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# If you're thinking about seeing a psychologist, chances are you have some questions.

Maybe you're wondering about practicalities, like Medicare rebates, or perhaps you're keen to find out what a session with a psychologist is like before you take the step of booking in.

We've walked thousands of clients through this process and we've learned so much from them about what it helps to know before you get started. This guide combines all of the questions we've been asked along the way, debunks some myths about seeing a psychologist and gives you some tips for finding a psychologist who feels like the right fit.

# DEBUNKING MYTHS ABOUT SEEING A PSYCHOLOGIST

It can be a daunting step to consider seeing a psychologist.

Why?

Of course, there are a whole range of reasons, but part of the picture seems to relate to the secrecy and myths surrounding therapy.

Conversations about mental health are increasing and stigma is reducing, but a whole range of myths, misunderstandings, misconceptions and stereotypes about seeing a psychologist still remain.

Understandably some of this misinformation can actually put people off seeking help.

We've set out to bust some of the most common myths and demystify the process of seeing a psychologist.

# Myth #1

## Speaking about your emotions and thoughts will only make them worse.

Of course different approaches work for different people, but in general, scientific studies show that when we speak about our thoughts and emotions they actually decrease in intensity.

This seems to be because talking about things can help us to work through confusion, problem-solve, see things from a new perspective, discover solutions and find clarity. Chatting can also help us to get some distance from our thoughts and feelings, and to feel less alone.





## Myth #2

There's no difference between speaking with a psychologist and speaking with a family member or friend.

A psychologist can provide a perspective that is unique and unbiased, in part because they are not involved in your personal life and therefore have no vested interest, but also because psychologists undergo extensive training to learn to listen in a way that is active, empathic, non-judgemental and objective. This particular way of listening often allows people to open up and explore beliefs, memories, experiences, ideas, fears and feelings that they might feel reluctant to speak about with friends or family.

**Therapy is also a space reserved just for you.** You can let go of the need to check-in with and take care of others. Your sessions give you time to focus solely on yourself.

This can be confronting and uncomfortable at first, but with time it can feel freeing to have a space where you can be open and honest about what's happening for you.

## Myth #3

Psychologists always focus on the past, especially your childhood.



When you first see a psychologist, in order for them to be able to get an accurate picture of what's happening for you, they will ask you some questions about your past, including your childhood. This helps your psychologist to get to know you better and it also helps them to understand the bigger picture and how it links to what you're wanting help with.

We understand that this process can sometimes be a daunting one. We'll take things at your pace though and will leave it up to you to decide what you do and don't want to speak about.

After this initial getting-to-know-you process, you and your psychologist will decide together what the focus of your sessions will be. Often clients find it helpful to focus on the present initially and then when they feel like their symptoms are improving or they're getting back on track, they may wish to look at the past for clues about why certain symptoms or patterns keep coming up. Other clients decide that they'd like the sessions to be focused in the present only. You and your psychologist will chat about what feels most comfortable and beneficial for you.



## Myth #4

Psychologists always give their clients a diagnosis.

Although psychologists are trained in the diagnosis of mental health issues, it is not always helpful or relevant for a psychologist to provide a diagnosis, and sometimes clients don't meet the criteria for a diagnosis anyway.

At Inner Melbourne Clinical Psychology our team works in a client-centred way. This means that we chat with you to figure out whether it will be useful and relevant to explore potential diagnoses. We will also speak with you about any hunches, recommendations or ideas we have because we believe that open and collaborative discussions are an essential part of us providing effective help.

## Myth #5

# A psychologist is only helpful if you have mental health issues.

Although many of our clients experience mental health issues, or have in the past, we also have clients who come to see us because they:

- Are at a cross-road or turning point in their life
- Notice that they're not feeling like they're regular self and want to chat about why this might be
- Need extra support to navigate a big change – like retiring, becoming a parent, having trouble conceiving, being diagnosed with a chronic or terminal illness, starting university, or going through a break-up
- Are looking for ways to enhance their wellbeing
- Want to get to know themselves better
- Value having someone objective and non-judgemental to chat about life's up and downs with
- Want a place where they can speak about issues that feel too confronting, upsetting or personal to speak openly with family and friends about
- Want to feel more connected in their relationships
- Want to feel more satisfied or fulfilled in their life
- Notice the same patterns popping up in their life over and over again and want to understand more about this
- Have a specific issue or decision that they want to work through. For example decisions about career changes or study, relationships, health or lifestyle.



## Myth #6

If your symptoms improve and you start to feel better, there's no reason to continue seeing a psychologist.



It's common to decide to take a break from therapy when your symptoms improve and you start to feel like you're getting back on track.

This makes sense, but when you feel stable and well, it can also be an ideal opportunity to explore why it is that certain patterns of thinking and behaviour continue to unfold in your life.

Why is this an ideal time to look at past patterns? Because when your symptoms improve you'll probably find yourself in a clearer headspace. You might also notice that you feel less vulnerable and less defensive or guarded which might mean you feel more comfortable to talk openly about some of the patterns you've noticed. Essentially, when you're feeling pretty stable and smooth, you'll have more fuel in your tank to go deeper with exploring these issues.

Not everyone wants to dig deeper and explore ongoing patterns in their life though, and that's okay. But for clients who do want to do this "next level" type of work, therapy can be a rewarding, eye-opening experience. It can help you to get to know yourself in a totally different way and open up new ways of seeing the world.

# HOW TO FIND A PSYCHOLOGIST WHO FEELS RIGHT FOR YOU



Research studies consistently show that the relationship between a client and their psychologist is one of the most important factors in determining whether counselling will be helpful.

In fact, the rapport that you have with your psychologist has been found to be more important than the type of treatment approaches the psychologist uses.

At Inner Melbourne Clinical Psychology each of our psychologists are experts in up-to-date, evidence-based treatment approaches, such as Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, Mindfulness and Schema Therapy.

At the end of the day, however, scientific studies suggest that what's more important than any of these specific treatment approaches is the match between you and your psychologist.

# How do you know if it is a good match with your psychologist?

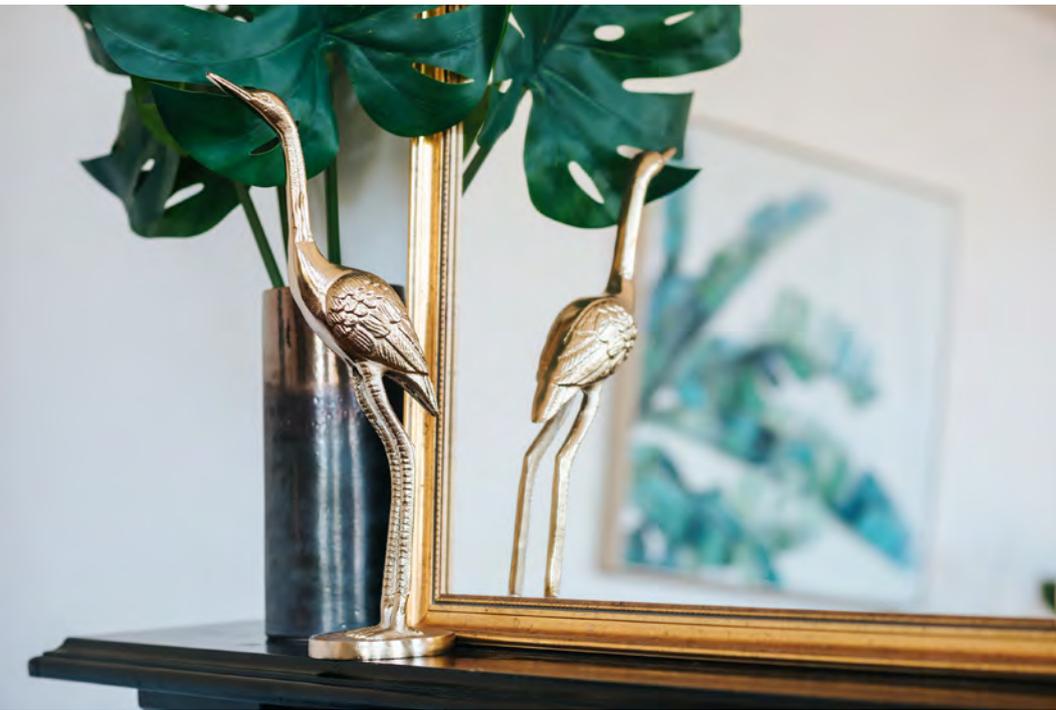
This is something only you can decide. Sometimes people find they get a gut feeling or hunch after their first session. Other people prefer to give themselves time and space for a few days after their first session to decide how they feel.

When trying to figure out whether you “click” with your psychologist it can be useful to ask yourself:

- Does there seem to be mutual respect between my psychologist and I?
- Do I feel safe enough to talk about private, sensitive, painful or uncomfortable topics with my psychologist?
- Do I feel that my psychologist accepts me without judgement?
- Do I get the sense that we’ll be able to work together effectively?
- Does my psychologist have expertise in the areas that I’m wanting help with?

It takes time to build a trusting relationship with your psychologist (just as it does with any person). If you feel safe, understood and respected though, it is likely that you have found a psychologist who is a good match for you.





## What happens when it doesn't feel like the right fit?

Trust your instincts. If it doesn't feel like the right match after a few sessions, as frustrating as this can be, don't give up. We each have unique personalities, so we can't possibly gel with everyone we meet. Although it can be a pain to have to tell your story again to another psychologist, in the long run it's better to find someone who you feel comfortable with than stick with someone who doesn't feel right.

At Inner Melbourne Clinical Psychology each of our psychologists understands and genuinely values the importance of finding someone you click with. We won't be offended or defensive if you decide that you would like to try another psychologist. We think these discussions are important and pride ourselves on being open to feedback about the way we work.

If it doesn't feel like the right match you can speak directly with the psychologist about how you feel and they can make suggestions in terms of who might be a better match (within our practice or at an external practice).

We also understand that sometimes those discussions feel confronting or uncomfortable, so if you don't want to speak with the psychologist you've seen you can instead chat with our Director, Dr Jacqueline Baulch. Jacqueline is a clinical psychologist herself and makes it a priority to ensure that all clients find a psychologist they feel comfortable and confident with.

# How we can help you to find the right match

We've created detailed biographies for each of our psychologists to help you with doing your own research. You can read through each of their profiles on our [Meet The Team website page](#).

Our profiles outline the psychologist's educational background, experience, areas of expertise and their general approach to working with clients.

After reading through our psychologist's profiles some clients feel ready to book a first appointment. Others prefer to gather more information before they make a decision. That's where our experienced Support Team come in. We know that seeking help isn't always easy and we're happy to guide you through the process to make it as smooth as possible.

Our Support Team is here to arm you with information that will help you to find a psychologist who feels like a good fit. Things you might like to discuss with us include:

- A run-down of which team members have expertise in the areas you are wanting help with
- If there any particular therapeutic approaches, such as Mindfulness or Dialectical Behaviour Therapy that you want your psychologist to be experienced with
- If there any therapeutic approaches that don't resonate with you and you would like to stay away from in sessions
- Gender preferences
- If you've seen a psychologist or counsellor before we can help you to nut out what worked well, and what didn't work so well, so we can use this information to help with matching
- Whether you find particular personality types clash with your personality. For example, you might feel you gel best with people who are gentle, or perhaps you find it helpful to have someone be more direct with you
- Your general availability (days and times) and preference for location
- Any general questions you have about seeing a psychologist, such as what to expect in the first session, fees and Medicare rebates.



# PRACTICALITIES

## Fees, Medicare and private health insurance

Each of our psychologists have different fees depending on the type of psychologist they are and their level of experience. All of our psychologists are registered Medicare providers. This means that if you have a Medicare referral you will receive a rebate for your sessions, which significantly reduces your out-of-pocket costs.

### **The Medicare “Better Access to Mental Health Care Initiative”**

This initiative is available if your GP believes you meet particular criteria for a mental health issue. This can include having difficulties adjusting to changes in your life such as losing a loved one, going through a divorce or separation, being unemployed, being a carer for someone with mental or physical health issues, or going through a break-up.

Eligible clients receive a rebate between \$84.80 and \$124.50 for up to ten individual sessions per calendar year.

It is up to your GP to decide whether you are eligible for a Medicare referral. If you are, they will give you a document known as a Mental Health Treatment Plan, which will enable you to claim your rebate. So that you don't need to complete the paperwork yourself, at Inner Melbourne Clinical Psychology we have an online system set up that allows us to arrange your rebate for you.

### **Private health insurance**

If you have private health insurance that includes psychological counselling as extras cover you may be eligible for a partial rebate for sessions. It is recommended that you contact your insurance provider for further information about your coverage because the amount rebated depends on the insurance company and level of insurance that you have. Having private health insurance does not restrict your ability to access services via a Mental Health Treatment Plan.

### **Private sessions**

If you are not eligible for a Mental Health Treatment Plan and don't have private health insurance, sessions with a psychologist are considered “private”. Private sessions with a psychologist are paid for out of your own pocket and do not require a GP referral.

# What should I expect from my first session?

After making your first appointment you will be sent an introductory email confirming your appointment date and time. This will also outline information about fees and rebates, and details about the location of Inner Melbourne Clinical Psychology. If you have a Mental Health Treatment Plan you will need to bring along this paperwork to your first appointment.

At the beginning of your first session your psychologist will briefly run through important paperwork with you. This will include completing a form with basic personal information (such as your name, date of birth, address and contact details) and a consent form that cover issues such as confidentiality, fees and other important information about sessions. If you have been referred by a GP or psychiatrist, we will discuss the details of your Mental Health Treatment Plan at this point.

After completing paperwork the remainder of the session is usually spent discussing the issues that have brought you into therapy. As well as developing a thorough understanding of your concerns, your psychologist will explore relevant background history, for example, information about your family, social relationships, work history and any past counselling that you have done. Based on this information we will begin to help you to understand more about what might be triggering and maintaining your current issues. If time allows we will also work with you to develop a collaborative and flexible plan for future therapy sessions.



# How long are appointments?

Sessions are approximately 50 minutes.

# How many sessions will I need to come in for?

Every person has a different journey through therapy. This is largely dependent on the nature of why they are coming in and what it is that they are hoping to get out of sessions.

At Inner Melbourne Clinical Psychology we tailor therapy to suit each of our client's needs and preferences. Some people come to therapy to develop coping strategies to reduce or manage symptoms of mental illness. This type of work can be short to medium term, but might also involve checking in less frequently over the longer-term to deal with setbacks or prevent relapse. Other people come to therapy to understand long-standing patterns (such as relationship issues) that stem from experiences during their childhood, or to receive ongoing support. This type of work tends to happen over an extended period of time, although again, this is dependent on client preferences. Sometimes people come to therapy for a one off session or just a handful of sessions to speak about a specific issue in their life or to talk through a particular concern.



# How does confidentiality work with a psychologist?

All information that you disclose in your session with a psychologist is confidential. There are two exceptions to this rule. The first exception is if you are at risk of harm to yourself or someone else and the second exception is in relation to court orders. If either of these situations become relevant your psychologist will discuss this with you.



## What is the process for booking in an appointment?

You can book an appointment via phone or our [online booking form](#).

Whichever way you book, our friendly Support Team will ask you briefly about:

- Some brief information about what's bringing you in. This helps us to ensure we're matching you with a psychologist who is experienced in the area you're seeking assistance with. If there is nobody on our team who is suitable we will provide you with some external recommendations.
- Details like your date of birth and contact information
- Whether you have a Medicare referral and the details of your GP
- Any preferences you have around a specific psychologist on our team, location, days or times you'd like to be seen.

Once we have found a psychologist who seems like a good fit for you, we will send you a welcome email. This email outlines your appointment time, date and location, as well as a few other useful bits and pieces, like how to find us and what to bring to your first appointment. You will also be sent an SMS reminder 72 hours before your first appointment.



## Other resources and ideas

When you're feeling overwhelmed it can be difficult to remember what to do to take care of yourself. For some tips and ideas take a look at our blog "[What to do when you feel swamped by your emotions](#)".

### Access our resources:

- [Free mindfulness, breathing and relaxation exercises](#)
- Download a free copy of our eBook [Finding Your Calm During the Storm: A Guide to Managing Stress](#)

For regular tips and inspiration for taking care of your mental health and wellbeing, following Inner Melbourne Clinical Psychology on [Instagram](#) and [Facebook](#).

# WHERE TO FROM HERE

We hope this little guide has answered some of your questions and debunked some myths that might have got in the way of you going ahead with seeing a psychologist.

We understand that it can be a significant step to make the decision to see someone, but we think it's well worth the time and effort.

Here are some handy links to get you started:

- Read about [our team of experienced psychologists](#)
- [Book an appointment online](#)

If you'd prefer to speak to someone to get the ball rolling give our friendly Support Team a call on (03) 9376 1958. We're here to make the process as smooth and seamless as possible.



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with one of our psychologists today.

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