

First treatment appointment

West Lothian Psychological Therapies Service

Information for patients



You have been offered an appointment for your first session of psychological therapy. We understand that coming to therapy can be a big step. This leaflet is intended to help you understand what to expect.

What is psychological therapy?

Psychological therapy makes use of the therapist's knowledge of psychological theory and your knowledge of yourself to develop an understanding of how your experiences, thoughts, feelings and actions are linked. Once we understand these links, we can think about how changing them might help you to feel and function better.

Psychological therapy has been shown to help with a range of mental health difficulties including: anxiety, low mood, obsessive compulsive disorder, trauma, and relationship problems. West Lothian Psychological Therapy Service offers therapy to patients where those difficulties are affecting their ability to function in daily life.



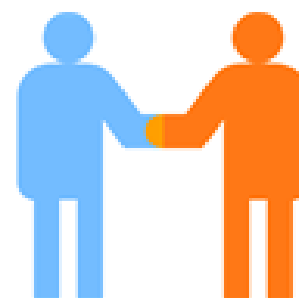
Psychological therapy is different from Psychiatry, in that our therapists are not medically trained and cannot prescribe medication as a treatment (though they may discuss this with your doctor if this is appropriate). It is also different to Counselling in that it is more focussed on actively making changes in thoughts and behaviours.

For these reasons, psychological therapy is most appropriate and effective where a person is interested in understanding their difficulties and in actively developing skills to make changes.

Who will I meet with?

Our team is made up of Clinical Psychologists, Counselling Psychologists, Psychological Therapists and Clinical Associates. Each of these has slightly different training and experience. We will have considered which will best suit your needs before we offer you an appointment. All our therapists have regular supervision and follow the codes of conduct laid out by organisations such as the Health and Care Professionals Council.

We are a training department, and you may be offered therapy with a trainee therapist. Our trainees are closely supervised and evaluated, and offer high quality therapy. Please ask to speak to the service lead if you have any concerns about meeting with a trainee.



How will I meet with my therapist?

Since the pandemic, our service has worked mainly remotely. You are only likely to be offered a face-to-face appointment if you are **unable** to use telephone or video for therapy.

If your appointment is face-to-face, please follow all the current guidance about infection control when attending hospital appointments. You can find this on the NHS Lothian website:



Scan the QR code using the camera on your smartphone to view the leaflet.

Alternatively, you can access the leaflet at this address:

[policyonline.nhslothian.scot/Policies/PatientInformation/COVID-19 Important Information on Attending Your Appointment.pdf](https://policyonline.nhslothian.scot/Policies/PatientInformation/COVID-19%20Important%20Information%20on%20Attending%20Your%20Appointment.pdf)

If your appointment is remote, you will have been sent a separate document with guidance about this.

How long will therapy take?

A therapy session typically lasts about 50 minutes. Our service usually offers 3-4 sessions in the first instance, to develop an understanding of the problems. After that your therapist will discuss with you whether they think further therapy will be helpful to you, and how many sessions they think that may take.

The number of sessions you may need will vary, but the evidence shows us that most patients are helped by around 12 sessions.

Sessions are usually offered weekly or fortnightly at first but may be further apart later in therapy.

How will I know if it is helping?

Your therapist will discuss with you regularly how you are finding therapy and which aspects of it are more and less helpful to you. They will give you a questionnaire to complete each session to support this discussion.



During therapy, because you are dealing with and talking over painful problems, there may be times, particularly in the early stages, when you feel a bit worse before feeling better. This is normal and it is important to keep working through this with your therapist's support. It is also important that you enlist support from your trusted others.

Please be open with your therapist if you feel you are not coping. It may be you need more immediate support. Onward referral to other services, including acute mental health services, is possible at these times.

It would be unusual for anyone to feel **entirely** better as a result of psychological therapy. Rather, therapy is about gaining the knowledge and skills to help you manage difficult feelings and experiences throughout your life. Your therapist will discuss your expectations for therapy with you.

What challenges might I face in therapy?

Motivation

As with making any changes in our lives, we need to commit time and effort to therapy for it to be helpful. Your regular attendance at sessions and your effort during and in-between sessions, combined with the support and guidance of your therapist, will help you progress with making improvements to your mental health and with staying well in the future.

Attendance

Attending your therapy sessions regularly will help you build on your progress. It also ensures your treatment plan is not interrupted, which will make it more effective in helping you address your mental health difficulties and keep the focus on your personal goals.

We do realise there may be times when it may not be possible for you to attend an appointment due to circumstances which are not within your control, e.g. illness. We ask you to discuss any difficulties with regular attendance of sessions with your therapist so that you can find a suitable solution that will allow you to engage in treatment at the most helpful time.

Information on what happens if you miss or regularly cancel appointments is detailed below.

Lifestyle

Your lifestyle can impact on how you are feeling. For example, daily routine, sleep pattern, substance misuse (drugs or alcohol) can impact on your ways of thinking and feeling to the extent that they interfere with therapy and with changes you can make.

Stressful life events

It may be you experience stressful life events (for example problems with housing or employment, or difficulties with relationships) at the same time as you are coming to therapy. Therapy may not be helpful at these times and can actually be an added stress.



All of the factors above are important when considering the timing of therapy and the reviews with your therapist will help you to talk these things over.

What if I can't or don't attend an appointment?

Missed appointments increase waiting times. Please give us as much notice as possible if you are unable to keep your appointment so we can offer your appointment to someone else.

- If you cancel your appointment on more than 2 occasions, it is unlikely we will be able to offer you another appointment and you will be discharged back to the care of your GP.
- If you do not attend an appointment and have not informed us, we reserve the right to discharge you back to your referrer. If you contact us within 4 weeks of the missed appointment you may be offered another appointment depending on your therapist's judgement. If more than 4 weeks have passed since the missed appointment you will need to get a new referral from your GP.

What happens at the end of therapy?

The therapy we offer is time limited, you will be working with an ending in mind. During therapy there is an expectation that you will develop your practice of the new strategies you are learning to help you manage your emotions without the need for regular therapy. Your therapist will work with you to make a plan for the end of therapy. This may include learning to recognise that problems are occurring again and taking steps to respond more helpfully.

We know that the relationship with a therapist can be an important one. For this reason, the ending of therapy can be difficult, and it is important to acknowledge and discuss this. While it is understandable to be anxious, it can also be a time to celebrate progress.

We will write back to your GP or referrer at the end of therapy to update them on how you are, and what you have done. It may be helpful to you to ask for a copy of this letter. If you need further support in the future for your mental health, then you would talk this over with your GP.

Is my therapy confidential?

All NHS Lothian staff must follow legal and professional guidelines on confidentiality and data protection legislation.



Your therapist is required to keep up-to-date clinical notes. All clinical notes are kept under conditions of strict security. Information is shared with your GP.

There are certain circumstances when we are obliged to pass on relevant information to other authorities without delay or your permission, for example, child protection matters.

To offer you the safest and best possible help, your therapist is required to discuss your case in supervision.

If you have any concerns or questions about confidentiality then please let us know and we can discuss them with you.

Who can I contact about my therapy?

You can contact our office on **01506 523 615** (during office hours or leave a message) with any questions about your contact with us. If you have any comments, feedback or complaints about your contact with the team please ask to speak to the Lead Psychologist.

Please note that we are **not** a crisis service. If you are in crisis you should contact your GP during opening hours or NHS24 on **111** at other times. You may also find it helpful to contact Breathing Space (phone support for those whose mood is low and may feel suicidal) on **0800 83 85 87**, or to text SHOUT to **85258** for text support. There is more helpful advice and information on **westspace.org.uk**.

