Therapy's working, but I don't always feel like going [1]

Dear Alice,

I've been going to therapy for some time now for general anxiety and obsessive tendencies, since about October last year. My question is do people always want to go to therapy or is normal sometimes to feel like "ugh, I don't feel like going/care to go tomorrow" like if it's more a burden or a... "Nuisance" than anything else. I can confidently say it's been helping me! But why do I feel like that sometimes? Is it normal? Shouldn't I know that I need it. That it's good for me?

Answer

Dear Reader,

First off, a big round of applause for engaging in therapy to help with your feelings of anxiety and obsessive tendencies. Therapy, even when you really want to go, is not always a walk in the park. Your feelings of indifference from time to time are very normal. Feeling like therapy is a burden or a nuisance can also be quite common – after all, many seek therapy to address tough topics in life, and actively working on those challenges can be exhausting!

Something you’ve probably already learned is that it’s good to pay attention to your feelings; it sounds like you’re doing just that! You also mention you feel confident your work in therapy is helpful. Examining your pre-therapy dread may also be incredibly fruitful. So, let’s look at some possible reasons for sometimes wanting to avoid therapy and then ways to acknowledge and reengage with your therapist. Here are some possible questions you may want to consider, especially during your therapy-averse moments:

- **Was there a specific time your feelings about therapy changed?** Not every session will make you feel good; in fact, some sessions may be challenging and difficult. Those sessions are a common part of the therapeutic process – sometimes you?ll feel good leaving a session and sometimes not so good. However, after thinking back on your time with your current therapist, has there been a distinct shift in how you felt about your therapy sessions? If so, consider exploring on your own or with your therapist what happened for you in this shift.

- **Do you feel comfortable with your therapist?** The bond you have (or don’t have) with your therapist can have a huge impact on the effectiveness of your work in therapy. Maybe you never felt like you could connect with your therapist. Or maybe something happened to impact the trust you have been building together. Research has shown that
the more aligned clients feel with their therapist, the more beneficial your work together will be.

- **If you are on medication, are you experiencing uncomfortable side effects and do you feel it is helpful?** If you are taking medication prescribed by your therapist or health care provider that doesn’t feel beneficial, this may also be a reason you don’t feel inclined to attend appointments.

- **Do you feel uncomfortable during your appointments?** Depending on the topic at hand or the type of therapy, actively dealing with anxiety and/or obsessive tendencies can stir up a number of unpleasant emotions or physical responses. Many times, this is the hard work needed initially to find relief down the road. Verbalizing and addressing your anxiety, in the moment, with your therapist can often result in an increased understanding of your discomfort.

- **Are there other factors that make getting to therapy feel more challenging?** Sometimes factors like commute time, appointment time, or even the amount you pay per visit can become deterrents to attending therapy regularly. Compromises you may have felt ok with initially may wear on you over time, making appointments feel more burdensome than helpful.

If any of the above questions seem to ring true, consider these suggestions to hopefully ease some of your worry:

- **Get real with your therapist.** If you’re feeling like the style of therapy isn’t working for you, something happened in a therapy session that you didn’t like, or you just aren’t connecting with your therapist, begin addressing these in your sessions. Talking about how something is not working for you or giving constructive feedback can sometimes feel daunting, but often times it’s the only way to help improve the therapeutic relationship. And most therapists will welcome your input (after all, they are working to help you). Talking about your experience of coming to therapy in a therapy session may also potentially increase your self-understanding.

- **Talk about side effects and medication options.** If you think your feelings of aversion may be due to discontent with your prescribed medication, consider making a list of side effects or ask about alternative prescriptions. It’s good to note that some undesirable side effects may go away over time, but keeping your therapist in the loop about what you’re experiencing and potentially exploring your medication options will hopefully lead to the most effective treatment.

- **Change it up!** If you think your appointment time isn’t a good fit, try thinking about a less stressful time or day of the week for scheduling. If your commute is a bummer, you may want to consider other forms of transportation to get you to and fro. And if your fee for therapy has been a deterrent, consider asking about your payment options. Some therapists may be able to offer sliding scale or reduced fees.

- **Shop around.** If you think you haven’t found the right fit with your therapist, you can always explore your options. Just like medications, your first try with a particular therapist may not be the best match. A lot of therapists will encourage new clients to explore their style for a few sessions before committing to long-term work together. If you decide to switch therapists, you may ask your current therapist for a referral or check out How to find a therapist.

Hopefully a few of the above suggestions will help you find a balance that works for you. Rest assured, dear Reader, your comfort and enthusiasm with therapy may continue to ebb and flow — this can be a normal part of your therapeutic process. In the moments when it’s hard to
remember that therapy's good for you, it might help to think about it like getting regular exercise. Sometimes you don't feel like working out. But even if you don't immediately feel great or see results, you know that physical activity is good for you so you do it anyway. And if you keep at it, it's likely that you'll be reaping the benefits in the long run.

Alice!
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