

Exploring Negative Past Therapy Experiences

Objective

To reflect on your past experiences with counseling or therapy and understand how both positive and negative experiences might influence your current view of attending counseling sessions.

What to Know

A negative experience with a counselor or therapist can be deeply painful, scary, and even traumatic. Bad counseling experiences can be compounded by the vulnerability you feel when opening up to a therapist. It may even lead to significant distress and a hesitation to seek further help. You may continue to struggle with unresolved issues that initially led you to seek therapy, which may not surface immediately in subsequent sessions because of your distress about past therapy experiences. Here are some common concerns, some of which you might have:

- **Fear of Starting Over.** You may feel overwhelmed by revisiting painful topics or discussing your issues with a new therapist. You may worry that the issues that originally brought you to therapy remain unresolved and are now intertwined with your negative experiences in therapy – making things even more complicated. Establishing a new level of safety is essential for you to feel secure enough to 'start over' with the therapeutic process.
- **Concerns About Reporting Previous Therapists.** You may feel protective of your previous therapist, fearing the repercussions of reporting them. You may also dread the additional emotional stress of having your experiences scrutinized by others, such as an ethics committee. Ask your new counselor about confidentiality so you can make informed, autonomous decisions about what to disclose.
- **Doubts About Being Believed.** You may fear your new therapist will not believe you, triggering feelings of rejection and disempowerment.

This worksheet is designed to help you reflect on your past experiences with counseling or therapy. Understanding positive and negative experiences and identifying underlying issues contributing to resistance can enhance the therapeutic process.

What to Do

Check off any concerns you currently have.

___ **Fear of Repetition.** You worry that your new therapist will repeat the behaviors of previous therapists. This could include fears of being misunderstood, judged, or not taken seriously.

___ **Vulnerability and Exposure.** After a negative experience, you might feel particularly vulnerable and hesitant to open up again. You may fear that exposing your emotions and discussing personal stories could lead to further hurt or misunderstanding.

___ **Loss of Control.** You may feel that engaging in therapy again might lead you to lose control over your emotional well-being, especially if you felt manipulated or coerced in past sessions.

___ **Cynicism Toward the Therapeutic Process.** A bad experience can lead to skepticism about the effectiveness of therapy. You may doubt whether therapy can actually help you or believe it is not worth the emotional investment.

___ **Fear of Emotional Dependency.** If a previous therapist let you down, you might be wary of becoming emotionally dependent on another therapist, fearing abandonment or disappointment.

___ **Concerns Over Confidentiality.** If your confidentiality was breached or your privacy was not respected, you might be overly cautious and anxious about sharing sensitive information again.

___ **Financial Strain.** If previous therapy was costly and ineffective, you might be concerned about the financial implications of investing in another therapy process without guaranteed outcomes.

___ **Impact on Self-Esteem.** If you had a negative therapeutic experience, you might question your own judgment or self-worth, wondering if you were at fault for the failures of past therapy.

___ **Resistance to Specific Modalities or Interventions.** If certain therapeutic approaches or techniques (like DBT, EMDR, etc.) were used ineffectively or insensitively in the past, you might be resistant to trying them again, even with a different therapist.

___ **Concerns About Therapist Competence and Ethics.** After a bad experience, you may be more critical and suspicious of a therapist's qualifications, competence, and ethical standards.

Describe your previous experiences with counseling or therapy.

What was the reason for seeking therapy?

How long did you engage in therapy or counseling? _____

Write down any positive experiences during previous therapy or counseling.

What specific aspects of the therapy did you find helpful or supportive?

Were there particular techniques or approaches that you felt were effective? Describe.

Reflect on the negative experiences during previous therapy sessions.

Were there any aspects of the therapy that were unhelpful or uncomfortable? Explain.

Did any negative interactions with a therapist or counselor affect your view or experience of therapy? Explain.

What issues might influence your current feelings toward therapy?

Do past traumas, beliefs, or personal values make therapy challenging? Why or why not?

Do you have any fears or anxieties about the therapeutic process itself? Describe.

Describe any resistance you feel toward therapy.

What are your concerns or hesitations about therapy? Be specific.

Are there specific topics or areas you find difficult to discuss or explore in therapy?

Write down three goals for your current therapy journey.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

What is one thing you hope to achieve through therapy?

How can your therapist support you in reaching your goals?

Discuss any specific expectations you have for your therapist and the therapeutic process.

Are there particular qualities or skills you value in a therapist?

What kind of therapeutic approach do you believe might work best for you? Why?

Your responses are important in guiding the therapeutic process and helping your current therapist or counselor understand your unique experiences and needs. If you find specific questions challenging, consider discussing them during your session for further exploration.

Reflections on This Exercise

Did anything surprise you about this exercise? If so, describe.

How helpful was this exercise? _____
(1 = not very helpful, 5 = moderately helpful, 10 = extremely helpful)

What did you learn from this exercise?
