

The American Psychoanalytic Association

(Excerpt from their site)

Overview

- Who can benefit from Psychoanalysis?
- What is Psychoanalysis?
- Who is a Psychoanalyst?

Who can benefit from psychoanalysis?

Psychoanalysis is an effective treatment for many people with moderate to severe difficulties and who have had unsuccessful attempts with briefer therapies. Because analysis is a highly individualized treatment, people who wish to know if they would benefit from it should seek consultation with an experienced psychoanalyst. Still, some generalizations can be made. The person best able to undergo psychoanalysis is someone who, no matter how incapacitated at the time, is basically, or potentially, a sturdy individual. This person may have already achieved important satisfactions - with friends, in marriage, in work, or through special interests and hobbies - but is nonetheless significantly impaired by longstanding symptoms: depression or anxiety, sexual incapacities, or physical symptoms without any demonstrable underlying physical cause. Many people come to analysis because of a pattern of repeated failures in work or in love. Others recognize self-destructive patterns of behavior they are unable to change. Others need analysis because the way they are - their character -

substantially limits their choices and their pleasures. Some feel a painful but vague sense of unease and emptiness. And still others seek analysis definitively to resolve psychological problems that were only temporarily or partially resolved by other approaches.

Whatever the problem - and each is different - that a person brings to the analyst, it can be properly understood only within the context of that person's strengths and life situation. Hence, the need for a thorough evaluation to determine who will benefit - and who will not - from psychoanalysis.

What is Psychoanalysis?

1. Psychoanalysis as a type of treatment

What is psychoanalysis about? What sort of help does the analyst offer, and what will be expected of me? How does treatment work, and how will I know if it is working for me? Psychoanalysis is based on the observation that individuals are often unaware of the factors that determine their emotions and behavior. Because these factors are unconscious, the advice of friends and family, the reading of self-help books, or even the most determined efforts will often fail to provide enough relief. Psychoanalytic treatment explores how these unconscious factors affect current relationships and patterns of thought, emotion, and behavior. Treatment traces these patterns back to their historical origins, considers how they have changed and developed over time, and helps the individual to cope better with the realities of their current life situation.

Analysis can be viewed as an intimate partnership, in the course of

which the patient becomes aware of the underlying sources of his or her difficulties, not simply intellectually but emotionally as well - in part by re-experiencing them with the analyst. From the beginning of therapy, patient and analyst work together to build up a safe and trusting relationship that enables the patient to experience aspects of his or her inner life that have been hidden because they are painful, embarrassing, or guilt-provoking.

In psychoanalysis, the patient typically comes four times a week, lies on a couch, and attempts to communicate as openly and freely as possible, saying whatever comes to mind. These conditions create the analytic setting, which enables you to become more aware of aspects of your internal experience previously hidden. As you speak, hints of the roots of current difficulties that have been out of your awareness gradually begin to appear - in certain repetitive patterns of behavior, thought, and emotion, in the subjects, which you find hard to talk about, in the ways you relate to the analyst. The analyst helps to identify these patterns, and together you and the analyst refine your understanding of the patterns that limit you or cause you pain, and help you elaborate new and more productive ways of feeling, thinking and behaving.

During the years that an analysis takes place, you wrestle with these insights, going over them again and again with the analyst and experiencing them in your daily life, fantasies, and dreams. You and the analyst join in efforts not only to modify crippling life patterns and remove incapacitating symptoms, but also to expand

your freedom to enjoy intimate relationships and professional and personal pursuits. Gradually, you will change in deep and meaningful ways; you may notice changes in your behavior, relationships, and sense of self. Before beginning psychoanalytic treatment, many people find it helpful to learn about some of the specific kinds of experiences that people often have when they start in analysis.

You may find that your analyst will talk less once the treatment begins. He or she will listen carefully to what you have to say, let you structure the sessions and set an agenda, allowing you to take the lead. He or she will speak when he or she has something to add to what you are saying. This may feel strange at first - people quite naturally expect their analyst to tell them what to talk about or to give them advice about how to solve their problems. But learning to watch where your thoughts and associations take you, without undue interference, is a vital part of the analytic process. Also, psychoanalysts understand that even the best direction and advice is limited in its potential to help you make meaningful and lasting changes in ingrained patterns of behavior and emotion.

Instead of providing more advice, your analyst will help you develop a greater understanding of the internal forces that are behind the difficulties that lead you to seek help, to help you understand why you think and feel and do things the way you do. In the end, this will enable you to change patterns that no longer work for you. One of the key goals of analysis is freedom, including the freedom of your mind to range freely in thought and feeling. It is very likely that problems in relationships are a part of the reason why you

originally sought treatment. Relationships are often a source of conflict, and they are an important source of information in psychotherapy. It will be important to discuss your intimate thoughts and feelings about significant people in your life, both negative and positive, with your analyst—including any thoughts and feelings you have about your analyst. In contrast to a friend, a relative, or a boss, your analyst is prepared to help you understand your experience - even if what you have to say is uncomfortable or seems inappropriate or rude. For example, if you think your analyst is condescending, clueless, intelligent, overprotective, attractive, or unkind - whatever you are thinking or feeling at the moment - it is wise to share it with him or her.

You will find that with your analyst you will be able to talk about anything that comes to your mind. Your analyst won't have any preconceived notions about what is right or what is wrong for you or what the best solution would be, and rather than repeating with you the sort of patterns you may encounter in life, he or she will help provide you with a new understanding. At first, you may find it difficult to talk about how you are experiencing your analyst. So, just like the important issues that brought you into treatment, your analyst will encourage you to share your thoughts and feelings regarding your relationship with him or her. One way the analyst does this is by encouraging you to speak as openly and freely as possible, sharing everything in your experience - whatever thoughts and feelings come to mind at the moment in session.

Ordinarily, people edit many of their thoughts and feelings, or may have never even put them into words before, because they feel what they have to say is too personal, or trivial, may hurt other people's feelings, or is simply absurd. Whatever the concern - it doesn't matter - it is important to share it with your analyst. What you think is too personal, trivial, hurtful, or absurd is often the key to something very important.

Your analyst will facilitate the therapeutic process by offering you use of the couch. Analysis is the only treatment in which the patient lies on a couch and does not look at the analyst. Lying on the couch and not looking at the analyst may seem strange at first but in most cases enables patients to think and feel more freely and spontaneously about their internal experience - and to express themselves without excessive concern about the analyst's reaction. Most patients actually prefer to work this way and become quite comfortable once they get accustomed to lying down.

Before long, you will find that you are able to talk freely and openly and you and your analyst will be able to collaborate in useful and unexpected ways that will help you grow. While analysis is productive and useful in a number of ways, you will encounter apparent roadblocks along the way. Real lasting change does not come easy and is often accompanied by unexpected discomforts, diversions, and delays. For some, this means feelings of anxiety or depression or crying episodes, which may make you worry that you are getting worse. Or the opposite may be true. You may feel all

your difficulties have vanished and you are ready to move on. For some, it means periods of silence, or spinning ones wheels, or boredom, or excitement, or a sense that nothing therapeutic is being accomplished. Sometimes you may even not want to come to sessions. You can be assured that such negative thoughts are completely to be expected, and they are typically a good indication that you are working on important issues.

To promote the kind of growth and change that analysis aims to accomplish requires time and energy, therefore, analytic treatment is open-ended. The treatment typically lasts for a number of years, a period to be mutually determined over the course of time by you and your analyst. Together, you and your analyst will decide when to end your treatment, and will spend some time processing the decision. It is important for you to talk about leaving treatment with your analyst before you stop coming. This period can be a most productive period of work, when you and your analyst review and organize your understanding of the work you have done together, and when you process your experience of ending this period of working together.

[Adapted from a piece written by Eve Caligor, M.D. and Lisa Piazza, M.D., Columbia University Center for Psychoanalytic Training and Research.]

Who is a Psychoanalyst?

The designation "psychoanalyst" is not protected by federal or state law: anyone, even an untrained person, may use the title. It is therefore important to know the practitioner's credentials before beginning treatment.

Graduate psychoanalysts trained under the auspices of the American Psychoanalytic Association have had very rigorous and extensive clinical education. Candidates accepted for training at an [accredited training institute](#) must meet high ethical, psychological, and professional standards. These candidates are either physicians who have completed a four-year residency program in psychiatry, psychologists or social workers who have completed a doctoral program in their fields or hold a clinical masters degree in a mental health field where such a degree is generally recognized as the highest clinical degree; all must have had extensive clinical experience. Outstandingly qualified scholars, researchers, educators, and selected other professionals may also be approved for psychoanalytic training. All accepted candidates, whatever their background, then begin at least four years of psychoanalytic training.

This training consists of three parts. Candidates attend classes in psychoanalytic theory and technique. They undergo a personal analysis. And they conduct the psychoanalysis of at least three patients under the close and extended supervision of experienced analysts. Candidates who plan to treat children attend further

classes and, with supervision, analyze boys and girls ranging in age from toddlers to late adolescents.

Besides conducting psychoanalysis, most graduate analysts also practice intensive and brief psychotherapy. Those who are psychiatrists sometimes prescribe medication. Many treat couples, conduct family or group therapy sessions, and work with the aging.

Because psychoanalysts are provided with the most thorough education available in normal and pathological development, their training enhances the quality of all their therapeutic work. It also informs their community activities as teachers, supervisors, consultants, and researchers, in the many different settings - hospitals, medical schools, colleges, daycare centers - where analysts are found.