

# How I Assess Fit with Potential Clients

*Discerning whether depth-oriented therapy is right for this season*

Before beginning therapy, I meet with potential clients to explore whether depth-oriented work is a good fit for them in this particular season of life.

This conversation is not about judging someone's depth, insight, maturity, or motivation. It is about discerning what kind of support is most likely to be useful right now. Different seasons of life call for different kinds of therapy.

Depth-oriented therapy asks for some capacity to slow down, reflect, become curious, and notice what is happening beneath the surface. It can be powerful work, but it is not always the best starting place. Some people are ready to explore patterns, defenses, body signals, dreams, relationships, family history, spirituality, grief, meaning, and inner conflict. Others may first need support with stabilization, symptom relief, emotional regulation, safety, practical coping, or building enough trust to turn inward.

## Listening for Readiness and Capacity

The initial conversation helps us listen for fit. We may explore what brings you to therapy now, what kind of help you are hoping for, what has helped or not helped in previous therapy, and what you hope might be different as a result of working together.

We may also explore whether you are mainly looking for symptom relief, deeper self-understanding, practical tools, spiritual exploration, relational healing, or some combination of these.

This helps clarify whether depth-oriented therapy, skills-based support, trauma-focused care, stabilization, or another kind of therapy may be most appropriate.

## Questions We May Consider

In an initial consultation, we may consider questions such as:

What brings you to therapy now?

Are you mainly looking for symptom relief, deeper self-understanding, practical tools, spiritual exploration, relational healing, or some combination of these?

How urgent, intense, or disruptive are your current symptoms?

Do you feel able to reflect on your experience, or does reflection tend to make you feel flooded, numb, ashamed, defensive, or destabilized?

Do you tend to intellectualize, overcontrol, perform, minimize, please, or stay emotionally guarded when vulnerable material comes up?

Are you interested in slowing down and becoming curious about what is happening beneath the surface?

Do you feel drawn to exploring recurring patterns over time, including relationships, family history, body signals, dreams, inner conflicts, meaning, or spirituality?

Do you currently have enough support, stability, and safety in your life to do deeper work?

Would more concrete support, such as CBT, DBT-informed skills, grounding, emotional regulation, trauma stabilization, or practical coping strategies, be more helpful at this stage?

What has helped or not helped in previous therapy?

What do you hope might be different as a result of working together?

## **When Defenses or Overcontrol Need Attention First**

Some people are highly defended or overcontrolled, often for very understandable reasons. They may rely heavily on intellectual analysis, self-criticism, emotional restraint, control, performance, pleasing, productivity, or staying "in their head."

These strategies may have helped them survive, succeed, or avoid vulnerability. But if defenses are too rigid, more reflective approaches can become frustrating or unproductive. The person may be able to talk about feelings, patterns, or history without being able to experience or integrate them.

In those situations, the first stage of therapy may involve gently working with the defenses themselves. That might mean building safety, strengthening emotional awareness, learning to notice the body, developing tolerance for vulnerability, softening self-judgment, practicing regulation skills, or simply learning what it feels like to slow down without becoming overwhelmed.

This is not lesser work. It may be the necessary foundation that makes deeper work possible later.

## **Possible Outcomes of the Consultation**

Sometimes the answer is yes: depth-oriented therapy seems well aligned with what the person is seeking and what they have capacity for. In that case, we may decide to begin working together, while continuing to adjust the pace as needed.

Sometimes the answer is more mixed. A person may want depth work but also need support in becoming less defended, less overcontrolled, or more able to tolerate emotional and bodily experience. In that case, we may still work together, but begin with stabilization, skills, trust-building, and gentle attention to the protective strategies that make deeper reflection difficult.

And sometimes depth-oriented therapy may not be the best fit right now. If someone needs a more structured skills program, intensive trauma treatment, crisis stabilization, substance use treatment, medication management, couples therapy, or another therapeutic specialty, I may suggest working with a different kind of therapist or treatment approach.

That recommendation is not a rejection. It is part of ethical care.

## **A Closing Reflection**

The goal is to match the approach to the person's needs, timing, capacity, and hopes. Good therapy begins not by forcing a method onto a person, but by asking what kind of help would actually serve them in this season of life.