

Your Therapeutic Road Map

Getting Where You Want to Go and Appreciating the Ride

Therapy is a huge investment; you're putting in your time, establishing a trusting and open relationship, as well as investing financially in your own growth and wellness. Too often, I hear the words, "I've been to therapy and it didn't help me." Of course, this *can* happen, but should not be the norm! How can you ensure that your therapy experience is a solid return on your investment? To get what you're looking for from therapy, you want to be *getting where you want to go, and where you weren't able to get on your own*. These tips in hand can help you achieve the growth and change you're desperately seeking to make when you work with a therapist.

- 1) **Determine your destination:** Like any journey, you want to know where you're aiming to go before you set out. How else will you know if you're heading in the right direction? Before you start therapy, or during or just after your first appointment, take some time to answer this question for yourself: "If in three months, therapy is helpful to me, this will have been the result." Identify how you will be thinking, feeling, what will have changed in your life due to your work on yourself. These are your end goals.
- 2) **Be clear about what progress looks like:** In keeping with the journey metaphor, any good road map has lots of markers, signs, and detailed measurements. If you were driving straight down the coast to Florida, you'd know that passing through New Jersey was an early milestone of progress on your way. You'd also be pretty confident that later when you pass through Georgia you're almost there. So what about your therapeutic progress? How will you know you're getting closer to your end goal? What would early milestones be, and what would some later ones be? Identify these as clearly as you can. For example, for someone working through a distressful divorce, early progress might be, "I will know I'm making progress when I am crying two or three times a week instead of every day," and later progress might be, "I will begin to feel more confident and stable in my ability to live and manage life on my own".
- 3) **Give feedback:** You are in the driver's seat of your therapeutic experience, and your therapist is your co-pilot, helping you by holding your map and navigating it all together so you can have a successful trip. He or she points things out along the way, observes the scenery, and might educate you on the local knowledge. BUT, you are the one who ultimately holds the wheel. Just as you'd ask your co-pilot to hand you your drink or adjust the A/C, you should give your therapist feedback on what you need from your experience, what works for you, and what feels helpful along the

way. For example, saying, “**I do best when....** I really understand why we are doing what we’re doing and I can learn the background of a certain exercise,” Or “**I feel like it’s helpful when...**we explore this aspect of my past and you connect it to how it’s showing up for me today,” are nice ways to request more of a behavior from your therapist.

- 4) **Ask questions and ask for help when you feel stuck:** Are you sick of the journey metaphor yet? I hope not, because we’re not done with it! As the driver, if you began to feel confused or lost, you’d ask for insight and help from your co-pilot. Same goes for therapy. If you’re uncertain or unsure about anything, from how you’re feeling, to what’s normal, to wanting to understand what your therapist is doing, **ask ask ask!** And if you’re feeling stuck, frustrated, stagnant, or uncertain, **share share share!** Your therapist should be able to join you where you are. They should explore and answer your questions. And they should want to know if you feel stuck. Sometimes, observing a road block together is what’s essential in moving through and onward.
- 5) **Celebrate!** Driving to Florida is long! When you get through New Jersey, you’d say, “woo! We got through New Jersey!” as you (safely) do a little dance with your hands. When you’re almost through Georgia, you recognize that you’re almost through Georgia and you take a moment to appreciate that you’re almost there. Do the same with your therapeutic progress. Take the time to pause and ask yourself, “what’s gotten better?” and “what’s changed?” and “where am I now?” Celebrate the small victories. Spend a moment each session talking with your therapist about a behavioral win from the week, something you approached just a little bit differently, or a way you thought about or noticed something that you wouldn’t have before, as a result of your experience in therapy. All of these smaller changes, like each passing mile on your trip, add up to the major growth and transformation that can come from therapy.

I hope this guide to Getting the Most out of Therapy helps you achieve your big goals, and ultimately, live your best life. If you have any questions, please call me, Lauren, at (860) 339-6515. I’m always to help you on your way.