

Part 1: Deciding to Seek Therapy

Note: I will be consistently using the terms “therapy” and “therapist”, but my specific experience is with behavioral therapy (cognitive-behavioral therapy) sought for management and treatment of Depression and Anxiety. While my experience with therapists is limited to those who practice this particular form, the traits that I will be discussing apply to a variety of medical professionals, therapists, and counselors.

The most important thing I have to tell you is this: The moment you decide to begin therapy, know that I am somewhere in this world high fiving/hugging you/squeezing your hand and celebrating the fact that you know that you are worthy of attention, assistance, understanding, and healing. I am a notorious celebrator of people - essentially a walking confetti cannon - and I will be your proudest friend and supporter.

As such, I want to make sure that the steps from your decision to seek therapy to attending your first session are as painless as possible. I won't pretend that my processes are universal and that every one of you have the time, energy, financial resources, support systems, and transportation that I have had and continue to enjoy.

Contending with your insurance company (if you have one) can be an issue if you seek a therapist outside of your network. My current therapist is out of network, so—you guessed it—I pay for each session out of pocket and cross my fingers that my insurance company will decide to reimburse some percentage of each session. This is a position of privilege I exercise because I consider it an investment in myself, my family, and my future. I understand that this is not an option for most people, so the advice I outline later on will be more comprehensive than “Put it on a credit card...because you're worth it”, primarily because of my understanding, but also because I don't feel like being sued by L'Oreal Paris.

When you are living with a mental illness that depletes your energy, manifesting enough to begin this process seems impossible. Because I am your friend, it is my obligation to tell you that you absolutely CAN do this. If you find a way to pull up a list of providers in your network and that is all you're capable of that day, that's perfect. You did it. Rest now. If you don't have insurance, but found the courage to ask a friend for advice or recommendations, or had them drive you to the local library to research your options and you feel exhausted, be exhausted. You did a brave, difficult thing.

I deeply hope that you are never made to feel shame for seeking help. If you are, know that Dr. Brene' Brown tells us that shame cannot survive being spoken—it [cannot survive empathy](#). A seemingly impossible catch 22, right? The thing that will help you get rid of shame is the thing you are made to feel shame for. Living with mental illness as a middle class white woman has not been particularly challenging for me with regard to the judgment and opinions of others around me. If and when I disclose my illness and treatment, I'm usually met with support, or—my favorite—“YOU go to a therapist?! But you're so happy!”, as if the fleeting moments of my life that some people witness must be standard representations of how I always feel or am in the world. However, the shame I have manifested within myself has been paralyzing and nearly fatal. My particular brand of Depression tells me that I am nothing and that the only emotion I deserve to feel is shame for existing. My shame is insidious. My shame only exists in my mind and unless I tell someone what it tells me, it will be the only voice I hear. I do not deserve that, and neither do you. If you don't believe that for yourself yet, that's okay for this moment; I will believe it enough for both of us until you're ready to accept it.