

Other things that you may need to think about

You may find it helpful to find a quiet space after your sessions with the psychologist to think about what was discussed and agreed.

It could be that friends and family have noticed changes in you and feel worried. You may want to explain to them that you will talk to them when you're ready. This will reassure them you are okay. It may also take pressure off you.

If you are not happy with the way things are going with the psychologist, try to talk to them about it. If you need to complain you could: talk to your GP; follow your local NHS guidelines; or go direct to the Health and Care Professions Council with whom the psychologist will be registered (www.hcpc-uk.org). You may also want to contact a local advocacy group who are there to help you express your views and concerns, and access information and services.



The British Psychological Society

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The British
Psychological Society

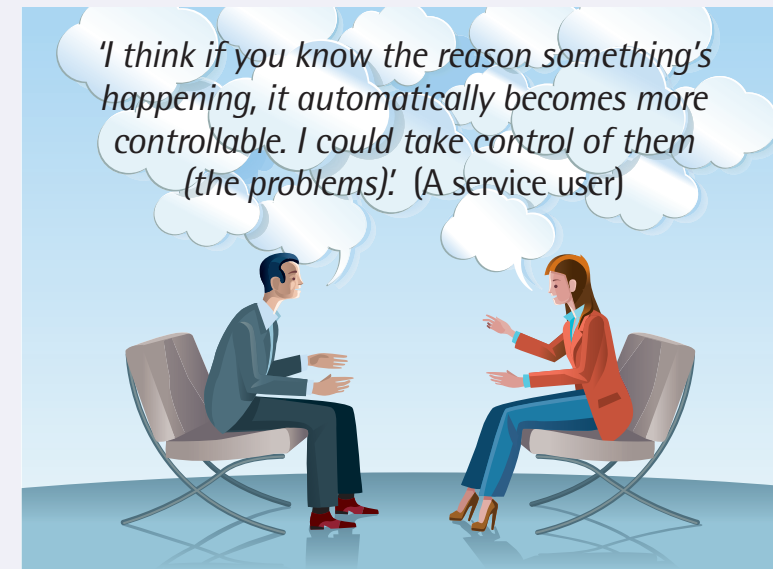


Division of
Clinical Psychology

Working with a psychologist

Understanding formulation

Clinical psychologists can help you to understand why you feel the way you do. Working together with a psychologist can help you make sense of your experiences. This can help you to make changes that can lead to a more meaningful life.



Introduction

A **formulation** is a joint effort between you and the psychologist to summarise your difficulties, to explain why they may be happening and to make sense of them. It may include past difficulties and experiences if these are relevant to the present. It acknowledges your strengths and resources. It also helps the psychologist work out what needs to be done in order for you to feel better and recover. There is quite a bit of evidence that developing this kind of account of your problems can be helpful. Often a formulation is used alongside a diagnosis given by a medical doctor, but sometimes it is used instead of a diagnosis.

The formulation process

Working on a formulation is like two people putting together a jigsaw. The pieces of the 'jigsaw' are pieces of information such as:

- How you feel at the moment;
- What's going on in your life now;
- When the difficulties or distress started;
- Key experiences and relationships in your life;
- What these experiences and relationships mean to you.

The formulation process begins during an 'assessment' appointment. How long it takes to complete the formulation process or 'jigsaw' depends on how complex the 'picture' is – it may not be started and finished in one session. However, there are usually enough pieces put together in a first session to give an idea of what the picture may look like. What helps the psychologist do this is their knowledge and experience of psychological theory and practice. This needs to be combined with your knowledge about your own life and experiences, in order to find a shared understanding and way forward.

An example

Ms A described to the psychologist how she was feeling low and weepy and was arguing more with her partner. The psychologist asked Ms A about her life just now, about aspects of her past and about her views of herself. Together they worked out that these problems began a few weeks after Ms A's new boss started work. This boss had been very critical of Ms A whereas her previous boss had thought highly of her. Ms A's mother was ill for long periods during her childhood and at these times she was cared for by her grandmother who was strict and could be very critical of her. This and the fact she was bullied at school had left Ms A feeling that she was 'never good enough'. Her boss's behaviour had re-awakened these feelings. Based on psychological knowledge, the psychologist spoke about how and why Ms A would have been affected by her experiences. She also noted Ms A's strengths. Ms A and the psychologist then agreed a formulation of why she was feeling as she was. They were then able to identify things that were likely to be helpful to her.



If psychological therapy seems right for you, the formulation provides a starting point to address your difficulties. You and the psychologist will return to the formulation and review it over time. This means it can be updated to respond to new information or changing circumstances. This way a formulation is never static – it will keep evolving throughout your work with a psychologist as you find out more about yourself.

Drawing up a formulation is a joint process and the psychologist will do their best to ensure that it makes sense to you. It is important that you tell them if there is anything that doesn't seem accurate. The more you are able to contribute to the formulation, the better. Only you can judge whether it fits, because you are the expert on your life and experiences.

Sometimes just having a formulation can be all the help you need. This is because understanding your difficulties helps you change how you deal with them.

Working with a psychologist

Finding a solution to problems may take time. It may be hard for you to look at some of your life experiences and make changes to achieve your goals. In the short term, therapy and counselling can be upsetting and they can also be emotionally challenging. Psychologists are trained to recognise this and to support you. Working with a psychologist is built on mutual trust. It requires openness from you and for you to be prepared to take part in the process. You also need to feel able to tell the psychologist if you disagree with anything or feel something needs to change about your work together.