In honor of Mental Health Awareness Month (May), I have decided to share my script for my TEDx Talk about therapy and its benefits. Below, you’ll find a slightly modified version of it.

When you hear the word “therapy”, what’s your reaction? I want you to think about that for a moment. Do you think “Yeah therapy is awesome!”? Or are you more like “Ugh, this again.” Are you somewhere in between? Well, I’m here to tell you that we should all go to therapy. Now, when I say therapy, I’m specifically referring to psychotherapy. You’ve probably heard of it, but you may not all have had a session with a therapist before, so I’m just gonna explain what it entails.  
  
Concretely, psychotherapy is a treatment that helps people with a myriad of different mental health conditions and emotional difficulties, but what it boils down to is you talking with a licensed therapist or psychiatrist who will listen and converse with you as well as help you learn coping mechanisms depending on what you’re struggling with. It’s important to note that there are MANY types of psychotherapy. Some examples are cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) which is identifying and finding alternatives to unhealthy behaviors (and is what I personally do), dialectical behavioral therapy which is a type of CBT that is rooted in emotions, interpersonal therapy, psychodynamic therapy, psychoanalysis, supportive therapy, etc. Some of you might believe in therapy and its importance, but others may hear the word and cringe or become uncomfortable, which is of course an opinion you’re entitled to, but my goal is to change your attitude through this talk.  
  
This aversion to it is very much rooted in the historical perception of therapy. While certain forms of psychotherapy have existed for a very long time, it was more formally “invented” in the early 1800s. Even so, therapy was very much a taboo subject, and to some people or in some parts of the world still is. Historically people who had genuine mental health issues were often diagnosed with female hysteria (for women specifically) or other degrading and false diagnoses, receiving lobotomies, and being subjected to a number of other very inhuman procedures. In the 19th century, therapists were called alienists which, believe it or not, contributed to the taboo nature of the practice, with the word “alien” coming from French and meaning insane, which you can probably assume did not give therapists the best reputations.  
  
Even today, there are many stereotypes and misconceptions about therapy, even around what it’s used for and for things as simple as where it takes place! A lot of people believe that you go to a therapist’s office, lie down on a couch and just vent about your problems, and while that last part may be accurate in some cases, sessions can take place anywhere. They can be done online while you’re in the comfort of your own home or bed, and if it’s in person, there may be a couch in the therapist’s office but you aren’t required to lie on it, you can just sit!  
Psychotherapy is also commonly seen as a necessity to “fix” an illness but, as I said, there are many types of therapy that have different goals.  
  
There are people who struggle with mental health and don’t (or simply can’t) get treatment. In the US, according to Mental Health America, “19.86% of adults[, nearly 50 million Americans,] are experiencing a mental illness [and] 4.91% [of them] are experiencing a severe mental illness.” Now, you might be saying, “Well I’m not an adult so I’m good!”, but from 2016 to 2019, 20 million people between the ages of 3 and 17 were diagnosed with either depression, anxiety, ADHD, or a behavioral disorder. What’s more, research shows that in 2022, almost 19% of teenagers in the US reported having seriously considered committing suicide, and in that same year, “over 20% of children with depression did not receive any treatment, [while] over 40% of children with anxiety received no treatment” (CDC). Some people may even have mental health imposter syndrome, which means that they don't feel like they deserve to go to therapy because their problems “aren’t big enough” even if they impact them. Therapy is a way of guiding people who are struggling with their mental health instead of leaving them to deal with them on their own.  
  
That lack of help can have fatal consequences. According to the Depression and Bipolar Support Alliannce, “ [t]he lifetime risk of suicide among patients with untreated depressive disorder is nearly 20%.” In the US, “[s]uicide is the second-leading cause of death for teens and young adults, ages 10-34” (CDC, 2022), while being “the fourth leading cause of death among 15-29 year-olds” in the world (WHO, 2019). However, people considering suicide aren’t alone. Psychotherapy is proven to help with depression and suicidal ideation, with a study by Frontiers (that was published in the National Library of Medicine) demonstrating how it helps with suicide prevention. Their review of observational studies showed methods of psychotherapy, mostly DBT and CBT, help decrease the risk of suicide “in patients with a diagnosis of borderline personality disorder (32.5%) and depression (15.0%)”, with suicidal ideation being reduced by 55% and suicide attempts going down 37.5%.  
  
Finally, some of you may not have anything you need help with but you don’t have to have a “big problem” or a severe mental illness to go to therapy! Even without one, it can be very beneficial. According to Dr. Gail Saltz, a professor of psychiatry, “[p]lenty of people […] come to therapy to understand themselves better, to work through areas that are more difficult, and to improve their ability to thrive and cope with adversity. [...] [She]’d say that often it would be best for people to seek therapy long before the crisis occurs in their life so they would be better equipped to manage the inevitable crisis or difficulty in their lives.”  
Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, considering therapy is really important. Even if you didn’t lose anyone or weren’t particularly affected by it, at least 3 million people died and basically everyone had to stay isolated, which can definitely have an effect on a person’s mental health, whether it be big or small. In 2021, the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration found that “69.1% of 12-17 year olds perceived that the COVID-19 pandemic negatively affected their mental health.”  
Therapy doesn’t only help you in the moment, it can also help you in the long-term. By developing healthy coping mechanisms, support systems, learning about yourself and your mental health, you have all the tools to deal with situations that you might be confronted with later in life. 75% of people who go to therapy benefit from it and when they are done with their sessions, individuals see their mental health symptoms get 80% better than for people who did not go to therapy (APA). And so, with the enormous benefits that psychotherapy can give us, we should all stop seeing it as taboo or bad so that everyone can benefit from it without shame because no one should feel alone in their struggles with mental health or be made to be guilty for getting the help that they need and deserve.  
  
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