

Why You Might Feel Worse After Therapy

(And Why That Doesn't Automatically Mean Something Is Wrong)

This handout offers one way of making sense of a common experience. It is not the final word, not a diagnosis, and not a claim that this framework fits everyone. If this perspective doesn't match your experience, that should be talked about directly.

Feeling worse after therapy is information. The important question is what changed and what the discomfort is telling you.

◆ 1) When Something Became Clearer

What's happening: Something may have landed that changed how you see the situation. An old way of protecting yourself may have loosened enough for something previously avoided or obscured to become visible. You may have seen something more clearly than before: something about yourself, another person, or the situation you are in.

How it often feels: Heavier. Quieter. Less certain but more honest. Less energized, more grounded. Sometimes lonely because an old explanation or protection is no longer doing the same work.

What this means: This kind of discomfort can be part of useful work. But discomfort by itself does not prove that therapy is helping. What became clearer, and what happens next, still need to be examined.

The old protection may still be reacting as though something is dangerous even while you are beginning to see the situation differently. The goal is not to erase the discomfort automatically. It is to understand what it is telling us.

◆ 2) When Support Changed

What's happening: Reassurance, validation, agreement, or another form of external support may have changed. That can expose how much stability was coming from outside you, but it can also reveal something about how the support changed.

How it often feels: Anxiety or panic. Anger or frustration. Feeling abandoned or unsafe. A strong urge to be reassured again.

What this means: The pain is real. It may show that you were relying heavily on reassurance or external stability. It may also mean support was removed too quickly or in a way that did not help. We have to find out which.

The goal is not to withhold support. It is to help you develop capacities that do not depend entirely on someone else providing stability.

Discomfort does not mean therapy failed. Sometimes it means something finally got honest. It also does not prove therapy is working.