

Would Therapy or Coaching Better Meet Your Needs?

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You know you want to improve your quality of life, and you've decided to seek professional help. Now one of your choices is whether to use the services of a psychotherapist or a personal coach. What are the differences?

To begin with, people seeking therapy often have a fairly significant problem, such as depression, anxiety, major relationship distress or bereavement. Coaching clients are usually high-functioning people who are looking to their coach to help them address specific situations in a focused, action-oriented way.

Many therapists believe it's important for clients to deal with unresolved issues from the past before they can optimally live in the present and fulfill their potential for the future.

In addition to addressing the current stressors that may have brought them to therapy, clients often explore such topics as patterns of past relationships with other people, including their families of origin. In the process, the clients frequently deal with emotional issues, heal past wounds and develop self-insight that can guide them more productively in the present and future.

Personal coaching, on the other hand, almost exclusively focuses on pragmatic elements of the present and future. Coaches and clients work together to assess major facets of the clients' current lives, articulate goals in areas the clients want to address and develop action plans related to meeting those goals. Along the way, coaches help motivate clients and keep them accountable in order to produce results.

Licensed therapists must meet rigorous requirements related to advanced education and licensure, and they must abide by specific laws and codes of ethics. At this point, personal coaching is an unlicensed, self-regulating industry. Certification is optional.

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When and where do coaching and therapy take place? Although this is not always the case, psychotherapy clients typically come in once a week to their therapists' offices. Coaches usually go to locations convenient to their clients or, more commonly, they work over the phone and via e-mail.

Those are just some of the distinctions between therapy and coaching. Despite the differences, therapy and coaching are both oriented toward tapping into clients' potential and helping them lead more fulfilled lives. They just go about it in different ways.