

## **A Guide to Starting Therapy**

So you're considering therapy or decided you want to give it a try, but you're not sure what to expect? First, congratulations on taking that first step! Second, you're not alone. It can be confusing and overwhelming, but we're here to hopefully help guide you and demystify starting your therapy journey with these helpful tips.

### **First, book an appointment with Counseling and Psychiatry Services (CAPS)**

If you are a UC San Diego student and want your mental health services covered by UC SHIP insurance, you need a referral to see a provider outside Student Health Services (except for LiveHealth Online and Lyra Health). Depending on availability, getting a referral can take some time, so be sure to do this ASAP. From the CAPS website, here are ways to book your first referral appointment:

- Call us: You can call (858) 534-3755 and schedule a first-time appointment
- Online: You can request a call-back to schedule an appointment through MyStudentChart
- Having difficulty finding time calling us? You can submit a request online for a call-back during specific times to schedule your first-time appointment
- Visit us: You can come to our Central Office at Galbraith Hall 190 and request to schedule a first-time appointment.

All routine first time appointments will be scheduled for a Brief Telephone Assessment (BTA) with a CAPS counselor. Brief Assessments are done remotely by phone: Monday through Friday 8:00 am to 4:00 pm PST.

During these assessments, the counselor will ask you a series of questions to assess your needs and what kind of care would best suit you. For short-term issues, they may have you see a CAPS counselor on campus or refer you to an off-campus provider for long-term care.

Note: If you are in crisis and in need of immediate assistance, please contact CAPS at 858-534-3755 (select Option 2 outside normal business hours). For life threatening emergencies, please call 911 or go to the nearest Emergency Room.

### ***If referred off-campus, here are some guidelines on choosing a therapist:***

**Do your research!** Not all therapy is the same—different therapists have been trained in different [types of therapy](#) they specialize in. When you're looking into potential therapists, read their descriptions and see if their therapy philosophy aligns with what you're looking for. Similarly, some people find it more comfortable to work with a therapist that is more likely to understand their personal life experiences. If that sounds like you, you may find it useful to filter potential therapists by gender, ethnicity, sexuality, religion, or any other factors you'd like to take into consideration.

**Consider cost.** If you're in a graduate program at UCSD, you likely have UC SHIP insurance. If that is the case, in-network therapy (AKA providers who have an agreement to be paid by your insurance provider) is low cost. Through UC SHIP, you only have a \$10 copay per session or sometimes even free therapy through services like [Lyra](#)! For more details on what is covered by UC SHIP at UC San Diego, see [here](#).

To see a list of in-network providers, you can go to your provider website and see therapists in your area. For UC San Diego, our provider is [Anthem Blue Cross](#). In addition, once you've gotten a referral from CAPS (more on that later), they will provide you with a list of recommended providers based on your needs.

Important! If you end up going out-of-network (not recommended considering the high cost, but sometimes not avoidable), please keep in mind that the "40%" of cost that UC SHIP claims to cover does NOT include the full cost of therapy. Instead, they actually cover 40% of a "maximum reimbursable charge" (MRC) that is not disclosed up front. For example, if your therapy costs \$200 per session, they may decide the MRC is only \$90, and then only cover 40% of that \$90. If possible, contact your insurance provider to see if they can give you an estimate for the MRC so you can budget appropriately.

It is also possible to ask a potential health provider whether they offer fees on a sliding scale. Some are willing to work with you to set fees that align with your income level.

Overall, while it's important to find a therapist that works for you, don't let the stress of over-paying outweigh the benefits you're seeking. Find a therapist that best suits what you can afford.

**Take advantage of consultation calls.** Before starting your first session, many therapists offer a brief consultation phone call where you're able to assess whether they're a right fit for you. Treat this like your lab rotations and make sure you find a therapist that passes the "vibe check" and has all the things you're looking for. It's totally okay to contact multiple therapists and shop around until you've found one that you click with and trust. [Here](#) is a list of example questions you might want to ask your new therapist before your first session.

**After starting therapy, don't give up!** With the previous advice in mind, sometimes you end up not clicking with your therapist as well as you thought. Maybe you don't feel comfortable telling them about some things, or you don't feel like you've made any progress after multiple sessions. If that's the case, it is *totally normal* to change therapists. Common courtesy is to let your current therapist know that it isn't working out. This can sometimes be a bit awkward, but ultimately it's beneficial for both of you to be honest—people switch therapists all the time, and sometimes your current therapist may even have recommendations for other providers!

Don't fall into the common trap of thinking that therapy isn't right for you just because it didn't work out with your first therapist. Oftentimes it can take a few tries to find the right therapist for you, but once you do, it's well worth it.

**Finally, take some time to be kind to yourself.** Starting therapy takes strength, and you should be proud of yourself for taking the time and effort to work on your mental health. It is perfectly normal to be exhausted after your first session (and subsequent sessions)—you may be unearthing trauma or thoughts that you’ve been suppressing for a long time, so emotional drainage is to be [expected](#). Seeking therapy also does not mean there’s anything “wrong” with you. Destigmatizing therapy is essential to improve the mental health of our community, and I encourage you to view therapy as just another part of your overall health care routine to help you better yourself.