

Preparing for a first session

A first session is not the moment you have to tell your story. It is the moment to see whether this feels like a place you could.

Opening up after trauma happens on your own timescale. For some people the first session means talking; for others it takes time, and both are fine. **You stay in control of what you share, and when.**

i This is yours to use however helps. A good clinician will not push you to disclose before you are ready. You have the right to ask questions, to say if something does not feel right, and to pause or stop. There is no right way to begin.

THE ORDER TRAUMA WORK TENDS TO FOLLOW



you set the pace; the story comes when the system can hold it

WHAT A FIRST SESSION CAN BE

A conversation to see if it feels right

- Questions about how the clinician works
- Saying what you need, and what you do not want
- Finding some **safety in the room**
- Going only as far as feels manageable

WHAT IT DOES NOT HAVE TO BE

A full account of what happened

- Talking about the trauma at all yet, unless you choose to
- Proving that you are **ready**
- Committing before it feels right
- Following the clinician's pace instead of your own

WHAT PAGE 2 HELPS YOU PREPARE

A few notes can make the first session feel more in your control. **You decide what to bring and what to keep.** None of it is required, and you can change your mind at any point.

1 ON YOUR TERMS

What you want them to know

A short version, only what you choose to share.

2 OFF-LIMITS FOR NOW

What you are not ready to discuss

You can name a topic as off-limits without explaining it.

3 YOUR QUESTIONS

What you want to ask

How they work, what to expect, fees, anything at all.

4 SAFETY AND SUPPORT

What helps you feel safe

In the room and in conversation, including if you become distressed.

WHAT ONE ENTRY MIGHT LOOK LIKE

WHAT HELPS ME FEEL SAFE · In the room and in conversation

Knowing I can pause at any time. Sitting nearer the door. Being told what will happen next.

REMEMBER

You are in control of your story. A clinician should follow your pace, not set it. If a treatment does not feel right, you can say so, and you can stop. **Finding safety first is not avoidance. It is how trauma work is meant to begin.**

Bring what helps and leave the rest. The aim of a first session is to find out whether this could become a safe place to begin.

Kezelman, C. A., & Stavropoulos, P. A. (2019). Practice guidelines for clinical treatment of complex trauma. Blue Knot Foundation. · Coventry, P. A., et al. (2020). Psychological and pharmacological interventions for PTSD and comorbid mental health problems following complex traumatic events: Systematic review and component network meta-analysis. PLOS Medicine, 17(8), e1003262. · Tran, T. T. T., et al. (2026). Phase-based versus non-phase-based psychological interventions for complex PTSD: A systematic review and meta-analysis. European Journal of Psychotraumatology, 17(1), 2644112.

IF YOU NEED SUPPORT If you are in immediate danger, call **000**. For support at any time: Lifeline **13 11 14** · Beyond Blue **1300 22 4636** · 1800RESPECT **1800 737 732**.

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This prep sheet is yours. Use the parts that help and ignore the rest. **You decide what to bring and what to keep.**

There is no need to fill all of this in. **Even one or two notes can make the first session feel more in your control.** What you write is for you; you choose what to share.

1 WHAT I WANT THEM TO KNOW

A short version, on my terms

Only what you choose to share. It can be a single sentence.

2 WHAT I AM NOT READY TO DISCUSS YET

Topics that are off-limits for now

You can name a topic as off-limits without explaining why. This can change over time.

3 MY QUESTIONS FOR THE CLINICIAN

What I want to ask

How they work, what to expect, fees and rebates, what happens if I need to stop.

4 WHAT HELPS ME FEEL SAFE

In the room, and if I become distressed

Where I sit, the pace, a signal for a pause, what helps me settle.

A NOTE ON USING THIS

Bring this, or keep it for yourself. **You decide what to share, and when.** A good clinician will work at the pace you set.

WHEN YOU ARE READY TO TAKE A FIRST STEP

The Meet and Greet is a low-stakes way to begin.

It is a short call to see if we are the right fit, with no obligation to continue. You can ask anything, and share as little as you like.

MEET & GREET

Free
15 minutes
Online or in-person
No obligation

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