

Your anxiety story: preparing for a first session

A first session is a conversation, not a test. Preparing is optional, and the prep is for you, not the clinician.

Some people walk into a first session with notes. Some walk in with nothing. Both work. **The prompts on page 2 are an option, not an obligation.** Fill in what helps you think; leave the rest. You can take this in with you, or leave it at home.

WHAT A FIRST SESSION USUALLY INVOLVES

A clinician asks, you answer, together you start to build the picture.

A first session typically runs for 50 to 60 minutes. The clinician will introduce themselves, explain confidentiality and how the session works, and then ask about what brings you in. The middle of the session is the conversation about what has been going on. The end usually includes some reflection on what has been heard and a sketch of what the work could look like.

You do not need a tidy account. Research describes how the early sessions are most useful for setting up what comes next: how you and the clinician agree on what you are working on, and how (Constantino et al., 2021).

WHAT TENDS TO BE USEFUL TO BRING

Anything that helps you describe the shape of it

- A rough timeline of when this started
- One or two specific situations that capture it
- Things you have already tried, in or out of therapy
- What you would want to be different, if you have a sense

WHAT YOU DO NOT NEED

The things people often worry about not having

- A diagnosis, or a sense of what is "really" wrong
- Words for what you have not yet found words for
- A clear goal or a treatment plan
- The whole story, in chronological order, without gaps

FOUR THINGS WORTH THINKING ABOUT BEFOREHAND

If you would like to do some thinking before the session, these are the four areas the prompts on page 2 cover. None of them needs to be answered fully. Bring what comes; leave what does not.

YOUR STORY

What has been happening

A brief, honest account in your own words. Not the polished version.

YOUR TRIGGERS

When it tends to come forward

Situations, times, people, decisions, anything that makes it louder.

WHAT YOU HAVE TRIED

What has helped, even partly

Therapy before, medication, self-help, what worked, what did not.

WHAT YOU WOULD WANT

What would be different if this went well

Not the perfect future. Just what a useful change might look like.

THREE THINGS PEOPLE OFTEN WANT TO KNOW

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Do I have to tell the whole story in the first session?

No. You can share as much or as little as you want to. The clinician will ask what they need to know to be useful. Anything that feels too hard to talk about can wait.

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What if I cry, or freeze, or cannot find words?

All three are common, and all three are fine. The room is set up for them. The clinician will adjust the pace. You will not have failed the session.

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How will I know if it is the right fit?

You will have a sense after the first session. The fit is meaningful information, not always the whole picture. If something does not feel right, you can raise it, or book differently next time. Taking it seriously is reasonable.

REMEMBER

You do not need to perform a first session. Arriving is enough. The rest is built together.

Four prompts, four boxes

Fill any of the boxes that help you think. **Leave the rest blank.** No box is required, and the order does not matter. A few sentences per box is plenty.

1

YOUR STORY

What has been happening that brought you to this point?

A few sentences in your own words. Not the polished version. When this started, what it has looked like, what has made it harder.

2

YOUR TRIGGERS

When does this tend to come forward, and when is it quieter?

Times of day, situations, people, decisions, environments. Also: anything that has reliably helped, even a little.

3

WHAT YOU HAVE TRIED

What have you already done about this, in or out of therapy?

Previous therapy, medication, self-help, advice from people you trust, things you have read or worked through. What helped, what did not, what felt wrong.

4

WHAT YOU WOULD WANT

If this went well, what would be different for you?

Not the perfect future. Just one or two things a useful change might look like in your day, your relationships, or your sense of yourself.

WHEN YOU ARE READY

Bring this if it helps. Leave it at home if it does not.

If you would like to talk before booking a first session, the Meet and Greet is a short call to see if we are the right fit, with no obligation to continue.

MEET & GREET

Free
15 minutes
Online or in-person
No obligation