

# How Therapy Works

Excerpt from *The Art of Changing* by Susan Peabody

Therapy is a mixed bag. Sometimes you have a good therapist and you get a lot out of it. Sometimes you have an inadequate therapist and it's a waste of time. But, nothing ventured nothing gained and if you're not satisfied with your progress in your support group, then giving therapy a try might do the trick. The individual attention and intuition of a therapist can untangle a lot of mysteries. And change always begins with the truth.

Of course, therapy is a slow process, especially if you just sit there and talk. What makes therapy work is acting upon the insights you get from a good session. Furthermore, your therapist is not going to wave a magic wand and change you. *You* have to do the work. One day I told my therapist that I was unhappy with the progress we were making. "What do you mean "we?" he said. "Well," I mumbled, "isn't this a team effort?" "No," he said, "You're the one that has to do the work. I hold the flashlight; you chop the wood."

I was shocked by this statement, but it was the beginning of a change in my attitude about therapy. I realized my therapist wasn't going to fix me. I had to start doing things differently if I wanted to change. The following story explains how therapy helped me change.

As long as I could remember, I had been angry with my mother both as a child and as an adult. Once I had a dream in which I was so angry at my mother that I was paralyzed. I couldn't move. I opened my mouth to scream at her, and the words got stuck in my throat. Later in the dream I was talking to my father, and he told me that my mother was pregnant. I went into a rage. Then my mother appeared and I screamed at her, "You are going to do to another child what you did to me?" I was so angry I woke myself up.

I didn't tell my therapist about the dream right away. Instead I went to my mother. I wanted to process my feelings about my childhood with her, so I asked her a lot of questions about what was going on in the family when I was young. Mom just stared at me. She didn't want to talk about it. "I don't remember," she said. I was livid. Not only had she neglected me as a child, and exposed me to the parent who had abused her, now she was impeding in my attempts to get better.

When I finally talked to my therapist about it, he said something interesting. He shrugged his shoulders and said sympathetically, "Oh, she couldn't do it." I stopped dead in my tracks when I realized that he didn't say "she *wouldn't* do it." He said she "*couldn't* do it." What a difference a letter can make. I suddenly began looking at my mother in a brand-new light.

Of course there was more to this story than this. One day while venting about my mother my therapist asked me why I was so angry at my mother. I told him that she had really hurt me. He said is that the only reason. I got angry and said, "What are you talking about." "Go deeper he said."

I was livid and then I blurted out. “Don’t you understand that when I am angry at her I do not feel so guilty about doing the same thing to my children.” He just smiled and ended the session. I went home and had a good cry.

These examples of how therapy worked for me must be take with a grain of salt. You must decide for yourself how this process should work. Just be open-minded, find a therapist who will give you some feedback, and open up. End the process with forgiveness or at least a more enlightened understanding of what happened.