

Turn over
a new leaf

Psychologists and
psychotherapy



Ordre
des psychologues
du Québec

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des psychologues
du Québec



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The Ordre des psychologues du Québec has over 7,000 psychologists as licensed members. Its primary mandate, as defined by the Professional Code, is to protect individuals using psychological services. Consequently, the Order closely supervises professional practice and answers questions and complaints from the public regarding psychological services.

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The purpose of this guide is to answer these questions that the Order is most frequently asked by people who wish to undertake psychotherapy or obtain psychological services. Should you require further assistance, do not hesitate to contact the Order's Information Service.

The Order also offers a Referral Service. To obtain the name of a psychologist in your area who can help you or to check whether the person you wish to consult is a licensed psychologist, call (514) 738-1223 in Montreal or 1 800 561-1223 elsewhere in Quebec.

This service is also available on the Internet. You can consult our Referral Service listings at any time from the comfort of your home by pointing your browser to www.ordrepsy.qc.ca and clicking on the *Service de référence* link of the public-accessible section of the website.

Why undertake

Anyone, at some point or other, can experience personal problems of a psychological nature. The most frequently mentioned reasons for seeking the help of a psychologist are:

- _ dissatisfaction with one's present life and the desire to bring about certain changes or to find new meaning in life;
- _ experiencing distress or a traumatic event: mourning, separation, illness, job loss or physical aggression;
- _ problems in relationships with others: difficulties meeting people we like, keeping friends or speaking to a group of people;

psychotherapy?

- _ couple problems: communication problems, increasingly frequent conflicts;
 - _ family problems: a child who constantly breaks established rules, a spouse who seems to evade responsibility;
- _ sex problems: low sexual drive, pain, premature ejaculation;
 - _ lack of control over our behaviour: overeating, drinking problems, smoking, drug problems or gambling;
- _ an intolerable work environment: burnout, abuse of power, work conflicts.

When should I consult?

When we feel a little down or depressed, when life seems difficult and happy moments seem few and far between, we naturally try to solve our own problems and turn to those close to us for help or sound advice. Sometimes it doesn't take much — a vacation, a heart-to-heart talk with a spouse, starting an exercise program — to regain our sense of balance and move on.

It sometimes happens however, that after trying various solutions, the situation does not improve. It may then be time to consider foreseeking for professional help to evaluate the problem and find solutions to make things better. Here are a few situations where you might consider consulting a psychologist without delay:

- _ When you are no longer able to carry out the tasks of daily living such as going to work or taking care of yourself, your children or your home;
- _ When you have the feeling that no one understands you, that people avoid you or that their advice is useless;
 - _ When you cannot overcome your feelings of distress or a traumatic event and find that the solutions you try are not working out;
- _ When you are feeling depressed, anxious, tense, angry or irritated more often than usual;
 - _ If you are finding it increasingly difficult to sleep;
- _ If you are afraid of dealing with situations that seem ordinary to others;
 - _ If you have a lump in your throat or cry often;
- _ If you feel your life is meaningless, with no hope of change.



Your child or teenager may also need help if you see any of the following signs:

- _ He shows a lack of interest in activities he once enjoyed (games, going out with friends, etc.), and always seems bored;
 - _ He is depressed or cries without reason, refuses to go to school, eats much more or much less than usual, spends too much time sleeping or has trouble falling asleep;
- _ He exhibits odd or unusual behaviour: irrational fears, uncontrolled anger or tantrums, repeated nightmares, refusal to talk, or any other disturbing behaviour;
 - _ He abuses alcohol or drugs, or is involved in gambling;
- _ His school grades have dropped dramatically and his teachers have noticed a change in his attitude;
 - _ He exhibits aggressive and violent behaviour toward himself or others.



What is psychotherapy?

For over one hundred years, psychotherapy has been the cornerstone of psychological services. Through the use of very specific techniques, psychotherapy enables people who are experiencing personal problems to change their thoughts, feelings and behaviours in order to reduce their suffering and lead a more satisfying life. In many cases, psychotherapy will provide people with new and more effective ways of dealing with the obstacles that life presents. For those who wish to resolve a serious psychological problem, both the general public and the scientific community agree that psychotherapy has proven to be one of the most effective and accepted means of doing so.

The process

When you start psychotherapy, you engage in a process of change that requires close collaboration with a psychologist. It is a process in which you can let yourself go, expressing your thoughts and feelings freely without fearing that you will be judged or criticized. Psychotherapy is rewarding but also often demanding. In psychotherapy, you may be encouraged to do exercises outside of the therapy sessions or to examine situations or emotions that frighten you. You may talk about things you have never discussed before. You may become aware of the fact that relationships with



others are changing as progress is made. You may also realize that certain thoughts and behaviours need to be modified.

Although psychotherapy may also be used with groups, families and couples, it is best known and most frequently takes the form of an individual helping relationship between the psychologist and his client. The first step in psychotherapy is an evaluation, during which the psychologist evaluates your problems, perhaps using tests and questionnaires or perhaps simply through an interview, in order to fully understand them and determine the best treatment plan for you. The first session is also an opportunity for you to break the ice and ask any questions that may be bothering you.

Duration

Changing the ways in which we think and act is not an easy task that can be accomplished in a few days. The duration of the psychotherapy will depend on many factors such as the seriousness of the problem, the objectives one wishes to attain, the frequency of the sessions, the type of therapeutic approach used, the client's reactions, the client's motivation to change and commitment to the process. Psychotherapy can therefore last anywhere from a few weeks to a year or more.

Do I have to take medication?

In some cases it may be necessary to take medication while in psychotherapy. Since psychologists do not prescribe medication, a relationship between a psychologist and a medical doctor may be established in order to coordinate pharmaceutical and psychotherapeutic treatment. It is therefore possible that a psychologist will recommend that the client consult a medical doctor. However, one must remember that it is the client who has the final say in deciding which treatment is best suited to his needs.

Psychologists offer psychotherapy services

Psychologists have received between five and eight years of specialized university training in psychology, depending on whether they have obtained a master's degree or a doctorate. They are trained in the understanding of human psychology and learn techniques that enable them to offer effective help to people with personal problems. In addition to academic courses, psychologists have completed supervised internships during which they have applied their knowledge in practice. Once they have received their diploma, psychologists are able to adequately evaluate the nature of a client's problem, to establish a treatment plan adapted to the client's individual needs and to provide treatment so as to meet the objectives that were determined together with the client.

In Quebec, the title of psychologist is protected by law. Psychologists must satisfy very strict requirements in order to be licensed as members of the Ordre des psychologues du Québec. Before undertaking psychotherapy, it is important to make sure that the person consulted has in fact received the necessary training. If in doubt, you can call the Order's Referral Service at (514) 738-1223 or 1 800 561-1223.





What type of therapy should I choose?

There are different schools of thought in the field of psychology, leading to a variety of psychotherapeutic approaches. These approaches differ from one another in terms of the theories on which they are based, the way in which they conceptualize psychological problems, the techniques used and their view of the therapeutic relationship. Although many different approaches exist, the four most commonly encountered are: cognitive-behavioural; existential-humanistic; psychodynamic-analytical and systemic-interactional. It should be noted that many psychologists do not limit themselves to only one approach in their practice. In fact, many psychologists use ideas and techniques from a variety of approaches, depending on the presenting problems of the client.

One should remain suspicious of trendy approaches that promise miraculous or ultra-rapid results for all types of problems and approaches that require participation in a secretive group or sect. Such “psychotherapies” usually turn out to be disappointing and costly and may even be harmful to one's personal development.

The cognitive-behavioural approach

The cognitive-behavioural approach is based on the principle that if maladaptive behaviour can be learned, it can also be unlearned. According to this school of thought, attitudes, habits and negative thoughts are learned responses and the best way to eliminate them is to learn new, more constructive ones. Emphasis is placed on the present, the here-and-now. During therapy, the psychologist will help his client to become aware of his own thoughts and beliefs, and to replace them with more realistic evaluations and judgements.

The existential-humanist approach

Psychologists who adopt this approach base themselves on the therapeutic relationship as their primary tool for bringing about change. Engaging in a therapeutic relationship with an open, understanding and accepting psychologist will enable the client to have a new experience and discover who he is, see himself as he really is, and in this way continue his personal development which had been interrupted. Therapy does not focus on the past but on the present and generally on the client's current emotions and life.



What happens in the first session?

The psychodynamic-analytical approach

According to this approach, a psychological problem develops when a person acts without being conscious of his true motivations and fears. Psychologists influenced by this school of thought do not focus, strictly speaking, on the client's presenting problem, but on the unconscious conflicts from the past which are at the root of the presenting problem. By becoming aware of these conflicts, the client comes to better understand why he acts in a particular way or feels certain emotions, thereby increasing his freedom of thought and action.

The systemic-interactional approach

According to this approach, a person's difficulties stem from his relationship with himself and others. A psychologist using this approach helps his client develop new interactional patterns in his relationships with others, seeking solutions which resolve, as far as possible, the expectations of all the persons involved. This approach encompasses methods of intervention often used to resolve a specific problem.

The first session is an opportunity not only for the client and the psychologist to meet but also to obtain information and evaluate, if necessary, the need to start psychotherapy. During the first session, each must get to know the other and establish the foundation for a mutually trusting relationship. The client can also openly describe the difficulties he is facing, enabling the psychologist to evaluate the ways in which he can offer professional help.

This step of the evaluation may last two or three sessions, in some cases may include the use of psychometric tests (evaluating, for instance, different aspects of the client's personality, his interests, or the extent of his symptoms). It is also an opportunity for the client to evaluate the psychologist and ask any questions that may be on his mind. Even if he feels anxious, nervous or preoccupied by his personal problems, it is important for the client to take the time to inform himself. The psychologist will then explain the main aspects of the proposed psychotherapy so that the client can give his consent in a free and enlightened manner. One should also not hesitate to ask the psychologist about his education and training, the type of therapy he typically uses, his approach, his usual way of working with clients, what sessions will be like and so on.

During the first session, it is appropriate to ask questions about the practical aspects of psychotherapy. For instance:

- _ What are the fees for each session, and when should they be paid?
- _ How long is each session?
 - _ How frequent will sessions be? (once a week, twice a week, etc.)
- _ What happens when one misses a session?
 - _ When are official receipts for tax or insurance purposes issued?
- _ What happens in the case of an emergency?
 - _ Are the sessions completely confidential?
- _ Will there be a file about me? What will be in the file? Will I have access to it?

This discussion will eliminate unpleasant misunderstandings and enable the client to begin psychotherapy with clear and accurate information.

During these first few sessions, the psychologist will be able to develop a plan with the client — in accordance with the client's needs, resources and the difficulties he may be experiencing — a mandate, some goals, a process and a way of working. The more explicit and open this discussion, the more beneficial therapy will be. It must be remembered, however, that this mandate is not firm: it will be useful to periodically review the progress being made in psychotherapy, to reevaluate the process and, if necessary, to modify the objectives.



How much does psychotherapy cost?

Psychologists offer their services in a wide range of settings and facilities, either in the public sector or in the para-public sector, and, as a result, their fees often vary. Psychologist's fees are not determined by a legislative body or by the Ordre des psychologues du Québec. Psychologists themselves set their fees according to their experience, the region in which they practice, and the importance of the professional service rendered. In private practice, one should generally expect to pay between \$65.00 and \$100.00 for a 50-minute psychotherapy session.

Currently, most group insurance plans allow for the reimbursement of at least a portion of the expenses incurred for a psychological consultation. Some individual plans also cover these expenses. Since reimbursement policies vary from one plan to another, it is important to read your policy carefully or to get information from your employer or union representative to understand which clauses apply. Since insurance companies reimburse fees for psychological services only when these services have been provided by a licensed psychologist, that is to say, a member of the Ordre des psychologues du Québec, it is important to be certain that the person you have consulted is one. To check if the person you have consulted is a licensed psychologist, you may call the Order at (514) 738-1223 or 1 800 561-1223.

How do I find a psychologist?



Fees paid to a psychologist for therapy qualify as income-tax healthcare deductions provided the receipts issued by the psychologist are filed with the return. However, the expenses that have been reimbursed by an insurance company do not qualify as an income-tax healthcare deduction.

A psychologist's services may also be available through a hospital or CLSC. In these cases, the psychologist's fees are covered by the government and you will have nothing to pay. You may, however, be placed on a waiting list for some weeks or even months, as the number of psychologists currently working in public healthcare is insufficient to meet the demand.

There are more than 7,000 psychologists, licensed members of the Ordre des psychologues du Québec, in the various regions of Quebec. However, not all psychologists practice psychotherapy. To find a psychologist offering services in your area, you have a number of options. You can call your local CLSC or hospital or talk to your family doctor, all of whom can guide you.

You can also call the Ordre des psychologues du Québec directly. The Order offers the general public a website as well as a telephone line specifically to assist psychological referrals. By calling (514) 738-1223 or 1 800 561-1223 you can obtain the addresses and telephone numbers of psychologists who practice in your area and have experience in treating the problems you may be confronting. You may also take advantage of this service via the Internet: the listings of the Referral Service are easy to consult and may be found by clicking on the *Service de référence* link of the public section of the Order's website (www.ordrepsy.qc.ca).



Your rights are protected

When dealing with a licensed professional, you have rights. The Ordre des psychologues du Québec is required by law to oversee the exercise of the profession by determining the training that psychologists must receive, ensuring their competence, establishing the ethical standards to which psychologists must conform and receiving complaints from the public, which are considered to be requests for an investigation.

Complaints from the public about services provided by psychologists are received and handled by the Order's syndic, or trustee, whose mandate is, first and foremost, to protect the public. The syndic studies the complaints and may initiate one of the following procedures:

- With respect to questions regarding professional fees, the syndic, at the client's request, may initiate a procedure called a conciliation of accounts between the psychologist and the client with the aim of arriving at a mutually satisfactory arrangement. If an agreement cannot be reached, the client may request a procedure called an arbitration of accounts in which an independent arbitrator will decide the amount of the fees.

- If the complaint concerns another subject such as the professional conduct of a psychologist, his competence or his respect of confidentiality, the syndic may, after his investigation, lodge a complaint with the Order's Disciplinary Committee, which will render a decision with regard to the complaint and, if appropriate, invoke sanctions against the psychologist as provided by law.

As the Order's syndic cannot handle complaints involving therapists who are not psychologists, it is very important to make sure that the person you have consulted or wish to consult is in fact a psychologist licensed with the Ordre des psychologues du Québec. This is the best way to guarantee that your rights are protected.