

Psychotherapists: What to Expect



1. What qualifications does one need to have to be designated as a psychotherapist in Ontario?

There are six colleges whose registrants can practice psychotherapy in Ontario:

- College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario (CRPO)
- College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO)
- College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario (COTO)
- College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario (CPSO)
- College of Psychologists of Ontario (CPO)
- Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers (OCSWSSW)



Each college sets their own requirements for their registrants to practice psychotherapy.

Only CRPO registrants can use the title “Registered Psychotherapist” (RP). Registrants of the five other colleges can use the title “psychotherapist” when they identify themselves; they also refer to their regulatory college, name of profession they practise, and restricted title conferred by their college.

A CRPO registrant’s current registration category and status can be verified on their public register: <https://www.crpo.ca/find-a-registered-psychotherapist/>

2. What is the role of a psychotherapist in supporting someone with autism?

Psychotherapy offered by Registered Psychotherapists is a primarily talk-based therapy intended to help people improve and maintain their mental health and well-being. Registered Psychotherapists work with individuals, couples, and families in individual and group settings. Psychotherapy occurs when the RP and client enter into a psychotherapeutic relationship where they work together to bring about positive change in the client’s thinking, feeling, behaviour, and social functioning. Individuals usually seek psychotherapy when they have thoughts, feelings, moods, and behaviours that are adversely affecting their day-to-day lives, relationships, and ability to enjoy life.

For an autistic person to gain the most benefit from psychotherapy, they must be able to

engage in reciprocal communication. If you are unsure about whether psychotherapy would be a good fit, it is best to contact the psychotherapist to determine whether the client would be able to engage meaningfully with them.

CRPO's Controlled Act Task Group determined that applied behavioural analysis is outside of the controlled act of psychotherapy.

3. What is the difference between a psychotherapist, psychologist, and a psychiatrist?

Psychotherapist: This is an umbrella term for any professional who is trained in the assessment and treatment of cognitive, emotional or behavioural disturbances by psychotherapeutic means, delivered through a therapeutic relationship based primarily on verbal or non-verbal communication.

Psychotherapists cannot provide diagnoses or prescribe medication. They also cannot use the Doctor or Dr. Title in a clinical setting. In Ontario, psychotherapists must be registered with the College of Registered Psychotherapists in Ontario.

Psychologist: This professional has a PhD in psychology. In addition to performing talk therapy, they have training in psychological testing and diagnostic assessments. Their fees are not covered by OHIP, and they cannot prescribe medication. In Ontario, psychologists must be registered with the College of Psychologists of Ontario.

Psychiatrist: This professional group has a medical degree and specialty training in psychiatry and, unlike most psychotherapists, can prescribe medication. While psychiatrists are trained in psychotherapy, their focus is on the biological aspects of mental health. They typically see patients for diagnostic assessment and treatment recommendations. As medical doctors, they are OHIP-covered.

4. Why might an autistic person need to see a psychotherapist?

Psychotherapists support many people and their families regarding a variety of concerns or problems. Anyone who is struggling with emotional difficulties, life challenges, and mental health concerns can benefit from seeing a psychotherapist, whether or not they have a diagnosed mental health condition.

Autistic people especially can benefit from access to psychotherapy because the co-occurrence of psychological disorders in autism can range from 10% (CDC, 2014) to as high as 70% (APA, 2013; Leyfer et al., 2006), including Anxiety, Depression, Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Specific Phobias, learning problems, obsessive-compulsive tendencies, and oppositional behaviours. Autistic people are also vulnerable to experiencing problems with language, social skills, and executive functioning (e.g., planning, self-monitoring, working memory, and self-regulation). Therefore, they may benefit from participating in more specific psychological interventions, separate from the interventions they would have been receiving in early intervention (e.g. ABA or occupational therapy).

5. Do I need a referral to see a psychotherapist?

Referrals are not required to receive psychotherapy services because they are not covered under OHIP. However, if you are using private insurance benefits to cover costs, your insurer may require a referral from a physician. While a referral might not be required, it can be helpful to discuss your concerns with your physician, as they may have recommendations regarding which clinician would be best suited to support you and your family.

6. What questions should I ask a psychotherapist when I contact them to provide services?

Some practical questions you can ask include:

- What should I expect on my first visit?
- How long will the appointment be?
- How much will it cost? Do you accept my health insurance?
- What happens if I miss a session?
- Can I contact you using email or text? Can I contact you outside regular business hours?

Some questions you can ask to determine if the psychotherapist is the right fit for you include:

- What type of psychotherapy do you provide?
- I am here because _____, and I'm having trouble with _____. Do you have training and experience working with clients with issues like mine?
- Do you have experience working with people on the autism spectrum?

7. Many autistic people experience sensory challenges; how can a psychotherapist accommodate this during an appointment?

Knowing which specific sensory challenges exist in advance is helpful. For example, if noise is a concern, any music playing in the office would be turned down or off during the visit. Lighting can also be dimmed. If perfumes or other scents are a concern, they would be eliminated as much as possible during the visit. If the patient has a comfort object/toy, they are sometimes encouraged to bring it with them.

8. Can a psychotherapist work with other professionals in supporting autistic people?

Clients are entitled to have their care coordinated by their health care providers when it is necessary and appropriate to do so and when the client explicitly authorizes such

collaboration.

Psychotherapists are expected to make reasonable efforts to communicate with other professionals (e.g. SLP, OT, ABA providers, etc.) when the client consents to such communications and it is likely to have a positive effect therapeutically. A psychotherapist cannot be held responsible, however, when another professional refuses to communicate or does not respond to their reasonable efforts to communicate about a client's care. Unsuccessful attempts to communicate should be noted in the clinical record.

A psychotherapist may decide not to communicate with professionals in the circle of care in cases where the communication is unnecessary, or where it will have a negative impact from a therapeutic perspective.

9. What is the typical fee for a psychotherapist? Is there funding available?

The average cost of private psychotherapy across Canada is between \$125 - \$175 per session. Psychotherapy services are not typically covered under OHIP but many private insurance companies offer coverage. You can contact your insurance provider directly to confirm whether their policy covers the services provided by CRPO registrants.

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