

Registered Psychotherapists: Information for Ontarians

What is psychotherapy?

Psychotherapy is primarily a talk-based therapy intended to help people improve mental health and well-being. Some psychotherapy may also include non-verbal activities like music, art or play therapy. Registered Psychotherapists (RPs) work with individuals, couples and families in one-on-one and group settings. Psychotherapy occurs when the RP and client enter into a psychotherapeutic relationship where both work together to bring about positive change in the client's thinking, feeling, behaviour and social functioning. People usually seek psychotherapy when they have thoughts, feelings, moods and behaviours that are adversely affecting their day-to-day lives, relationships and the ability to enjoy life.

What is a controlled act?

Under Ontario law, certain acts, referred to as "controlled acts," may only be performed by authorized health care professionals. The [Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991](#) governs those procedures or activities that may pose a risk to the public if not performed by a qualified practitioner. Examples of controlled activities include performing invasive procedures below the skin (such as administering injections), prescribing drugs, ordering X-rays and administering anesthesia.

What is the controlled act of psychotherapy?

By definition in the *Regulated Health Professions Act*, the **controlled act of psychotherapy** involves five elements:

- i) Treating,
- ii) by means of psychotherapy technique,
- iii) delivered through a therapeutic relationship,
- iv) an individual's serious disorder of thought, cognition, mood, emotional regulation, perception or memory that,
- v) may seriously impair the individual's judgement, insight, behaviour, communication or social functioning (*RHPA 1991*). All five elements of this definition must be present in order for the controlled act to have taken place.

RPs use their knowledge, skill and judgement to determine whether their clients' condition is serious. They do this by considering the client's own assessment, the RP's own clinical assessment, and/or the assessment by another care provider.

All five elements must be present for an activity or intervention to fall within the controlled act of psychotherapy.

Who can provide the controlled act of psychotherapy?

In Ontario, members of six regulatory colleges are authorized to provide the controlled act of psychotherapy provided they do so in compliance with the regulations and the bylaws established by their regulatory colleges. In addition to Registered Psychotherapists, these are: practitioners who are registered with the College of Psychologists of Ontario, Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers, College of Nurses of Ontario, College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario, and College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario.

Counsellors, life coaches and other professionals who are not registered with a [regulatory college](http://www.ontariohealthregulators.ca/) [hyperlink to <http://www.ontariohealthregulators.ca/>] whose members are authorized to provide the controlled act are not permitted to provide the controlled act or represent themselves (“hold themselves out”) as psychotherapists.

Indigenous persons providing traditional healing to other Indigenous persons or members of an Indigenous community are also exempt from the RHPA and therefore are not required to register with CRPO in order to provide care; however, CRPO is establishing an Indigenous pathway [[link to https://www.crpo.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Indigenous-Pathway.pdf](https://www.crpo.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/Indigenous-Pathway.pdf)] for those practitioners seeking CRPO registration.

Spiritual leaders or clergy who practise on the basis of their religious beliefs (such as using prayer or other spiritual means) are generally not considered to be providing psychotherapy. This is because the care they provide (and the way they provide it) does not fit the definition of the controlled act of psychotherapy. Moreover, there is provision in the *Regulated Health Professions Act* (RHPA) that exempts individuals treating a person by prayer or spiritual means in accordance with the tenets of the religion of the person giving the treatment. This means that clergy are not required to register with CRPO in order to do their jobs.

However, some spiritual care practitioners who provide spiritually integrated psychotherapy who are indeed required to register with CRPO. These care providers use psychotherapy technique to provide spiritually integrated psychotherapy that may or may not be religiously informed, but faith and religion do not drive or limit the psychotherapeutic conversation. Like all RPs, these spiritual care practitioners are required by CRPO to have the knowledge, skills and judgement to provide care that is safe and ethical and that puts the best interests of their clients first.

What should I expect in my work with a Registered Psychotherapist?

When you choose a RP as your care provider, you should expect:

- A conversation about the **benefits, risks and expected outcomes** of the psychotherapy and the opportunity to give your **informed consent**.
- A clearly communicated, mutually agreed upon **goal** or **plan** for the psychotherapy.
- Each therapy session has a **clear beginning** and a **clear end** where problems or concerns are presented and discussed and outcomes are explored.
- The RP demonstrates the appropriate use of **boundaries** to create a **safe and confidential environment**.

Why should I choose a regulated provider?

The Regulated Health Professions Act created governing bodies (called colleges) to regulate the care provided by professionals in the province of Ontario. In order to ensure that the care provided by its members is competent, safe, ethical and effective, each regulatory college is required to develop:

- entry to practice competencies
- professional practice standards
- a code of ethics
- a quality assurance program
- continuing competence measurements
- a sexual abuse prevention program
- professional misconduct regulations

Regulated health care providers are accountable to their college. If there is a concern about the conduct of a regulated provider or the care they have provided, a complaint can be made to their college. It is then the responsibility of the college to investigate and address that complaint.

What makes an effective psychotherapeutic relationship?

The client-psychotherapist relationship is the foundation of psychotherapy. This psychotherapeutic relationship is central to the provision of safe, effective and ethical care. Psychotherapeutic relationships are based upon trust and the development and maintenance of appropriate and professional boundaries established in a confidential environment.

In an effective psychotherapeutic relationship:

- your well-being is at the forefront;
- you will work with your RP gathering relevant information that will support the formulation of a plan for psychotherapy;
- there will be continuous evaluation of outcomes of each session and the impact on overall treatment goals;
- your RP will practise **safe and effective use of self**;
- your RP will adhere to the **standards of practice** for the profession.

What kinds of therapies should I expect a Registered Psychotherapist to be competent to use?

All RPs care for people using at least one of these types of therapies:

- Cognitive and Behavioural therapies
- Experiential and Humanistic therapies
- Psychodynamic therapies
- Somatic therapies
- Systemic and Collaborative therapies

Some RPs have greater expertise in certain types of therapy than others and may use a variety of techniques and approaches in your sessions together. Ask your RP what kind of therapy they provide, and address any questions or concerns you may have with them.

What is the difference between counselling and psychotherapy?

In counselling, the focus is on providing information, giving advice, encouragement or instruction. For example, a counsellor may work with you to foster life skills, teach you techniques for coping with immediate causes of stress or anxiety, or offer crisis intervention.