
Supportive Therapy in an Inpatient Psychiatric Hospital

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Supportive therapy is a psychotherapeutic approach focused on providing emotional and practical support and strengthening a patient's coping mechanisms. Here we share tips for how to implement supportive therapy in the inpatient unit.

Key Components

1. Active and empathic listening

- Provide a calm, focused presence, acknowledging the stress of the inpatient environment. For instance, "I know this environment can be overwhelming. Let's take this time to focus on your thoughts and feelings."
- Summarize and reflect back to ensure the patient feels heard, eg., "It sounds like you've been going through a tough time and haven't felt like you've had much support. Is that right?"

2. Provide emotional support and encouragement:

- Validate the patient's experiences: "You've been through a lot. It makes sense you're feeling this way."
- Offer words of encouragement and acknowledge progress, no matter how small: "You've shown a lot of strength in dealing with these challenges."
- Ensure you or someone else is available to provide support when needed: "If you start feeling overwhelmed again, you can reach out to me or nursing staff."

3. Help develop coping and problem solving skills:

- Help the patient develop coping strategies that can be practiced in the inpatient environment, like deep breathing, art therapy and journaling.
- Guide patients in identifying their problems and brainstorming potential solutions. Say, e.g.: "Let's identify the main challenges you're facing and think of different ways you can approach them. What feels the most manageable to start with?"
- Encourage reframing of negative thoughts. "When you think 'I can't handle this', try telling yourself 'I'm learning new ways to cope every day'."
- Offer guidance on recognizing early warning signs of a crisis and effective strategies for seeking help, like reaching out to nurses.

4. Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques

- Integrate mindfulness practices like guided meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, and mindful breathing exercises to help patients manage stress and anxiety. *(See FS on Relaxation and Deep Breathing).*
- Teach relaxation techniques that can be easily practiced, such as visualization, yoga, or tai chi.

5. Use of Digital Tools and Apps

- Introduce patients to digital tools and apps that can support mental health, such as meditation apps, mood trackers, or cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) based apps
- Highly-rated apps include: Calm, Happify, Headspace, MoodKit, Sanvello and Worry Watch