



A LEAD MAGNET FROM BARAKA

Your First Therapy Session

What to expect, how to prepare, and how to tell whether the fit is right.

BARAKA Ontology & Clinical Counselling

West Vancouver, BC · Bilingual: English & Farsi

Mental Health · Naturopathic Medicine · Coaching · Community

barakaocc.com

Before we begin

"You don't have to know what's wrong before you reach out."

If you are reading this, you are probably considering therapy for the first time, or returning after a long break, or starting again with a new clinician. The most common thing we hear from new clients is some version of: *I almost didn't book. I wasn't sure if I was bad enough. I didn't know what to expect. I worried I'd be wasting your time.*

This guide will demystify the process. By the time you finish reading, you will know what therapy is and isn't, what the first session actually looks like, how to prepare, what questions to ask, and how to tell whether the fit is right.

Part 1 — What therapy is, and what it isn't

What therapy actually is

- **A confidential professional relationship** with a regulated mental health practitioner
- **Trained in evidence-informed approaches** for the issues you bring
- **Bound by clinical and ethical standards** with significant accountability
- **A space designed for your inner work** — your patterns, your wounds, your growth
- **An ongoing collaborative process** — usually weekly or biweekly across several months
- **Adjustable in pace, depth, and focus** based on what you actually need

What therapy isn't

- **It isn't advice-giving.** A good therapist asks more than they tell. The wisdom usually comes from inside you.
- **It isn't fast.** Real change in patterns that have been with you for decades takes time. Most therapy unfolds across months, not weeks.
- **It isn't only for people in crisis.** Some of the most rewarding therapy is preventive, developmental, and growth-oriented.
- **It isn't friendship.** The relationship has different rules — better, in some ways, than friendship for the work it's designed to do.
- **It isn't medication management.** Therapists don't prescribe. We coordinate with physicians and psychiatrists when medication is part of the picture.
- **It isn't permanent.** Most therapy ends. The goal is for you not to need us anymore.

Therapy versus coaching versus counselling

Different professions, overlapping skills. **Therapy and counselling** usually focus on healing — anxiety, depression, trauma, relationships, identity. **Coaching** usually focuses on forward-looking goal work. At Baraka we offer both, with clinically-trained coaches who can recognize when a coaching question is actually a therapy question.

Part 2 — How to prepare for the first session

The honest answer: less than you think

You don't have to write a list of what's wrong. You don't need to know your diagnosis. You don't need to have your story organized. The therapist is trained to ask the questions that surface what matters.

That said, a few things help

- **A sentence or two on what brought you in.** Not detailed — just enough to start. "I've been struggling with anxiety for the last year." "My relationship is in trouble." "I lost my mother and I'm not okay." "I just want to understand myself better." All valid.
- **A note on what you've tried before.** Previous therapy, medications, books, programs. Helps the therapist not repeat ground that didn't help.
- **Anything you specifically don't want.** "I don't want CBT." "I don't want to be told to meditate." "I don't want my parents pathologized." Knowing what you don't want is information.
- **Practical info:** insurance details, whether you want video or in-person, time-of-day preferences. Helps with logistics.

Reflection prompts (optional)

Reflection:

- What is the actual reason I'm reaching out now, as opposed to last year or next year?

- What would I want to be true in 6 months that isn't true today?

- What am I afraid will happen in therapy?

- What am I afraid will happen if I don't do therapy?

Part 3 — What the first session actually looks like

The shape

First sessions are usually 50–60 minutes (couples sessions are 90 minutes). About 15 minutes is administrative — confidentiality, consent forms, brief intake. The remaining time is the beginning of the actual work.

Most of it is listening

The therapist will ask why you came, then mostly let you talk. They will follow what feels alive in your story rather than running through a checklist. They will ask occasional clarifying questions. They will try to get a sense of who you are, not just what's wrong.

What you might be asked

- What brings you in now? (Not last year, not next year — now.)
- What is the situation? Briefly — we'll come back to details.
- What have you tried before? What helped? What didn't?
- What are you hoping for? (You don't have to know — "I'm not sure" is a fine answer.)
- Is there anything I should know about how to work with you?
- What would tell you, six months from now, that this work was worth it?

What you can expect to leave with

- **A felt sense of whether the fit is right.** Often the most important thing.
- **An initial framing of what's going on** — though full clarity takes longer.
- **A proposed direction** — what we might work on, in what order, at what cadence.
- **Practical next steps** — booking the next session, any homework if appropriate.
- **Permission to think about it.** You are not required to commit at the end of session 1.

Part 4 — How to tell whether the fit is right

Therapeutic fit is one of the strongest predictors of outcome. It's also somewhat intangible — you'll know it when you feel it. That said, here are the markers we'd encourage you to listen for.

Good signs

- You felt heard — not just understood intellectually but actually heard.
- You felt safe enough to share something you don't usually share.
- The therapist's pacing matched yours — neither rushed you nor lost you.
- You came away with a sense of possibility, not despair.
- You're already thinking about what you want to bring next time.
- You felt the therapist's intelligence and presence engaged with you, not performing for you.

Yellow and red flags

- You did almost all the talking and got very little back.
- The therapist gave a lot of advice or interpretation in the first session.
- You felt pathologized — like you were a diagnosis being processed.
- Cultural, religious, or identity context was missed in ways that mattered.
- You came out feeling worse without a sense of why or where it's going.
- Boundaries, fees, or scheduling felt unclear.

If the fit isn't right

It's okay to not return. It is also okay to share, in the moment or by email, what didn't land. A skilled therapist will receive that information without defensiveness. Many clients see two or three therapists before finding the one. The work is too important for the wrong fit.

Part 5 — Practical questions to ask

Questions about credentials and approach

- What is your training and credential? (RCC, RP, MFT, RSW, Registered Psychologist, etc.)
- What modalities do you primarily work in?
- Have you worked with people in my situation before?
- What is your approach to [my specific concern]?

Questions about the practical structure

- What is your fee, and is it covered by extended health benefits?
- How frequently do you typically see clients?
- How long does therapy usually last for issues like mine?
- Do you offer in-person and online?
- How do I cancel or reschedule? What is your cancellation policy?
- Are you accepting clients now or is there a wait?

Questions about confidentiality

- What are the limits of confidentiality?
- How do you handle records?
- Do you communicate by email or text? How is that secured?
- What happens if I run into you in public?

Questions about the relationship

- What can I expect from you? What do you expect from me?
- How do you handle moments where I'm unhappy with how the work is going?
- What is your approach if I want to take a break or end therapy?

Part 6 — What's specific to Baraka

If you're considering therapy at Baraka specifically, a few notes that may help:

Our approach

We're integrative and depth-oriented. Our clinicians draw on EFT, Internal Family Systems, Jungian and depth psychology, somatic approaches, Satir systemic work, hypnotherapy, psychedelic-assisted preparation and integration, and more, in proportions matched to what each client actually needs. We are not a one-modality clinic.

Languages

We work in English and Farsi (Persian) at full clinical depth. Many of our clinicians are Iranian-Canadian and bilingual; therapy can happen in either language or fluidly between them.

Beyond therapy

Baraka is also a centralized place for naturopathic medicine (Dr. Rosita Fatemi, MD-trained ND), integrative coaching, professional supervision for therapists, workshops, and a community platform with forums and groups. Per our founder Elham Zolfagharinia's vision, the practice is built around healing the whole person — mental, physical, relational, and spiritual.

Free 15-minute consultation

Every Baraka clinician offers a free 15-minute Meet & Greet — phone or video, in English or Farsi. Use it to ask anything you want, share what you're carrying, and get a felt sense of fit before committing to a session.

A final note

Reaching out for therapy is one of the bravest things a person does. The discomfort you feel right now — wondering if you're doing the right thing, whether you're "bad enough," whether anyone will understand — is universal. We've seen it in every new client, including the ones who came back later and said it was one of the most important decisions of their lives.

Ready when you are.

Baraka offers depth-oriented therapy, naturopathic medicine, integrative coaching, and community in West Vancouver — in English and Farsi, in person at our Ambleside office or online across British Columbia. Our practice is built around the belief that healing happens at the intersection of clinical rigour, cultural fluency, and the deeper questions of meaning, identity, and being.

What a first step looks like

- **Free 15-minute consultation** — a no-pressure conversation by phone or video to ask questions and explore fit.
- **First session** — 50 to 90 minutes depending on the service. Mostly listening; we go where the work goes.
- **Ongoing therapy or care** — only if it's the right fit, at a cadence that works for your life.

Book a free 15-minute consult → barakaocc.com | (236) 455-6306

This guide is educational and is not a substitute for clinical care. If you are in crisis, please call 9-8-8 (Canada Suicide Crisis Helpline, 24/7) or go to your nearest emergency department.

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