



### WHAT IS WALK AND TALK THERAPY?

Put simply, it's counselling or psychotherapy sessions that take place in the outdoors rather than in a conventional indoor setting or online. The location is agreed in advance with the client setting the pace – from a relaxing stroll to a more energetic, fast-paced walk.

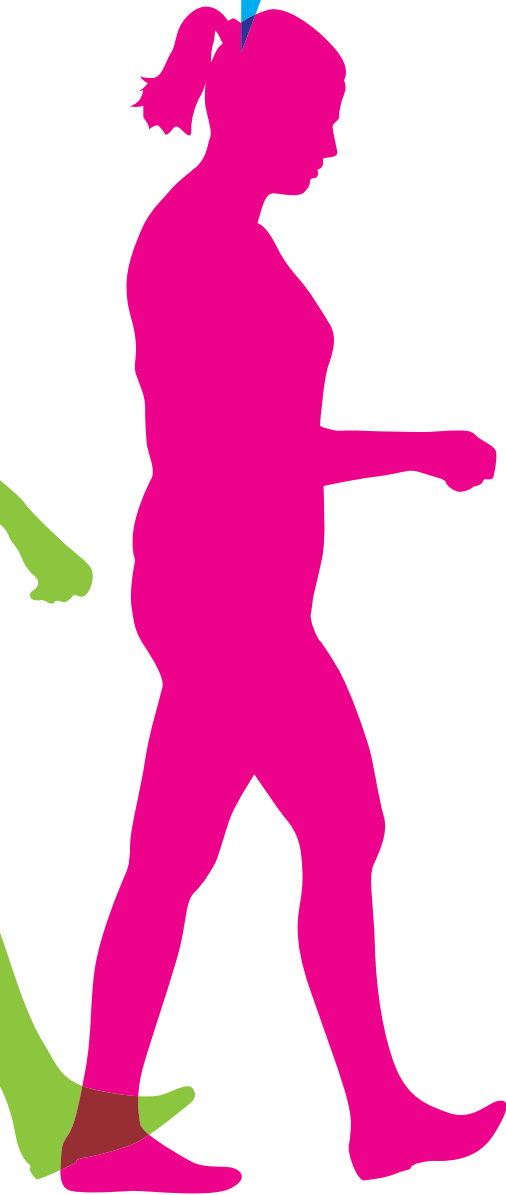
### WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF WALKING WHEN HAVING A TALK THERAPY?

There are many. Combining therapeutic support with walking in nature can be very meditative and grounding for clients, and it is well established that access to and exercising in green space is good for health.

Because the client walks alongside their therapist rather than sits facing them,

the session can also feel less formal and intimidating, particularly when there are periods of silence. It's even been suggested the therapeutic space becomes more democratic (Berger, 2009), removing the potential power difference created by the 'therapist's office and space', as the environment is 'shared' by both client and therapist. And of course walking forward is itself a metaphor for moving ahead,

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INTRODUCTION  
TO WALK AND  
TALK THERAPY



symbolising change and getting past difficult times.

The outdoors allows for a much richer engagement with our environment, which can be utilised in a number of ways, depending on where the client is on their therapeutic journey. Statements such as 'I feel as if everyone is looking at me', or 'It feels that I could choose a different path today' can prove very useful in a session.

On a physical level, walking improves circulation. As well as the obvious health benefits, this helps to activate both sides of the brain, synchronising the right hemisphere, involved in logical, rational thinking, with the left, which is linked to feelings and creativity.

#### WHO MIGHT IT BE PARTICULARLY GOOD FOR?

Walk and talk therapy is useful for people dealing with transition, grief, a life crisis, or who simply feel 'stuck'. Research has shown improvements in depression, anxiety, mood, self-esteem, grief and bereavement, among other things.

#### IS THERE A STRONG EVIDENCE BASE FOR WALK AND TALK THERAPY?

It's a relatively new form of therapy, with a limited number of small-scale studies to date, but more research is constantly emerging. Much of this is coming from the fields of eco-psychology, eco-therapy, wild therapy, wilderness

therapy, conservation theory and animal-assisted therapy, to name a few (Jordan, 2014; Totton, 2011; Buzzell and Chalquist, 2009).

Jordan (2014) describes walk and talk therapy, or eco-therapy, as something that can help to heal the human-nature relationship, and includes a range of therapeutic and reconnection practices, such as horticultural therapy, 'green' exercise, eco-dreamwork, community eco-therapy, dealing with eco-anxiety and eco-grief, and more (Buzzell and Chalquist, 2009). In addition, the UK charity Mind has published reports on ecotherapy (Mind, 2013; 2007), which found that people's mental health significantly improved after activities in nature.

One study conducted by the University of New Orleans found that walk and talk therapy speeds up the process of therapy and allows the therapist and client to get to the issues more quickly (McKinney, 2011). It seems that rapport can be built together faster this way than in the traditional seated arrangement.

Research from Doucette (2004) highlighted that walk and talk therapy with young adolescents encouraged them to make improved pro-social choices in behaviour and allowed them to experience increased feelings of self-efficacy and wellbeing.

Pretty and Barton (2010) showed that exercising outside in green environments improves both self-esteem and mood, with

the presence of water generating even greater effects. They also reported that the 'mentally ill' showed one of the greatest improvements in self-esteem.

#### WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?

I'm often asked what happens if the client or therapist bumps into someone they know. Or what if someone overhears the conversation? These sorts of things get discussed before the session, along with how the therapist and client will proceed in such an event. Resting or changing route are both simple ways to resolve or avoid such situations.


#### WHAT IF THE WEATHER'S BAD?

The weather can sometimes be a concern, particularly if it's icy, raining or very hot, and, in such instances, it can be agreed to

have an indoor or online session instead. However, in reality the weather rarely turns out to be a reason for not conducting a walk and talk session. It can actually feel quite invigorating to be outside in different conditions, as long as the right

clothing, gear and products (such as sun cream) are used.

#### HOW CAN SOMEONE FIND A WALK AND TALK THERAPIST?

Walk and talk therapy is relatively new in the UK, but an increasing number of psychotherapists and counsellors are starting to incorporate it into their practice. A Google search will help to identify a suitably trained therapist in your area, but check they belong to a relevant accredited register, such as the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) or British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. 

#### REFERENCES

For full references, go to [fht.org.uk/IT-references](http://fht.org.uk/IT-references)



Lara Just is a psychotherapist (UKCP Acc), and founding director of ADADSU (Adapt-Advance-Succeed, [adadsu.com](http://adadsu.com)) and offers walk and talk therapy

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