

A FREE GUIDE · LANCE NABERS, LPC

How to Start Therapy

A step-by-step guide for first-timers.



Lance Nabers, LPC — 25 years, 24,000+ lives supported.
Telehealth therapy in TX, CO, WA, HI & ID · lancenabers.com

You've been thinking about it. Maybe for a few weeks, maybe for years. You know therapy could help, but something keeps getting in the way — not enough time, not sure where to start, maybe a quiet voice asking whether you really need it.

You're not alone. Nearly **60% of Americans say mental health has become more important to them in the last five years** — yet access to care has actually declined. The gap isn't about desire. It's about not knowing the next concrete step.

This guide gives you that.

Why People Hesitate — and Why It's Worth Pushing Through

Before we get into the how, it helps to name what gets in the way. Research shows the top barriers to starting therapy are:

- **Cost and insurance confusion** — 34% of Americans have reduced mental health spending due to financial stress
- **Not knowing what kind of therapy to look for** — 37% of people aren't sure what type would help them most
- **Stigma** — especially among younger adults, with 46% of Gen Z workers saying stigma has stopped them from seeking care
- **Finding the right fit** — 19% say they don't know how to find someone they'd actually trust

The good news: every one of these is solvable. And most people who do start therapy report that the hardest part was making the first call — not the therapy itself.

Step 1: Get Clear on Why You're Coming In

You don't need a diagnosis or a crisis to start therapy. But having some sense of your "why" will help you find the right therapist and make your first session far more productive.

What's been bothering me that I keep pushing aside?

Anxiety, relationship patterns, grief, stress, low motivation, a general feeling that something's off — all of it is valid. You don't need to have it perfectly articulated. A good therapist will help you clarify it together.

What would feel different if therapy worked?

Think concretely. "I want to stop waking up at 3am with my mind racing." "I want to stop avoiding hard conversations with my partner." "I want to feel like myself again." These aren't just goals — they're signals pointing to the right kind of help.

What's been stopping me from starting?

Sometimes the very things keeping us from starting therapy are exactly what we need to work on. Fear of vulnerability, doubt about whether change is possible, or a belief that other people's problems are "worse" — these are worth naming honestly, even just to yourself.

Step 2: Decide What Format Works for Your Life

Online vs. in-person therapy is one of the most common questions people have — and the answer is personal.

Online therapy tends to work well if you have a busy schedule, limited transportation, or if you feel more comfortable opening up from home. Costs are often lower, and access is wider if you live in an area with few providers.

In-person therapy can feel more grounded and connected for people who find it easier to be present in a dedicated space. If you're working through something that benefits from physical cues — body language, nervous system regulation, somatic work — in-person is often the stronger choice.

Neither is better across the board. The format that you'll actually show up to consistently is the right one.

A note on cost: Many therapists accept insurance, offer sliding-scale fees, or provide reduced rates for first sessions. Don't let cost be the reason you don't reach out — ask directly when you contact a therapist. Most are willing to work with you.

Step 3: Find the Right Therapist (This Part Matters More Than You Think)

Therapist fit is one of the strongest predictors of outcomes in therapy. Not their credentials alone, not their office location — the *relationship*. Here's how to find someone you'll actually connect with.

Use Psychology Today's directory

PsychologyToday.com/us/therapists lets you filter by location, specialty, insurance accepted, gender, and more. Build a short list of 2–4 therapists whose profiles resonate with you.

Think about fit before you reach out

Consider: Do you prefer a male or female therapist? Someone with expertise in a specific area — trauma, anxiety, relationships, life transitions, identity? Cultural background or lived experience? These preferences are worth honoring. Therapy works when you feel safe, and safety comes from fit.

Request free consultations — and use them

Most therapists offer a free 15–20 minute phone or video call. Take them up on it. Use that time to ask real questions:

- What's your approach, and how would you describe your style?
- Have you worked with people dealing with [your specific concern]?
- What does progress typically look like with your clients?
- What are your fees, and do you accept insurance or offer sliding scale?

You're not being demanding — you're being a thoughtful consumer of your own care. The right therapist will welcome these questions.

Ready to take the next step? Book a free 15-minute consultation with Lance — no commitment, just a conversation.

Book your free consultation →

Step 4: Define What You Want to Work On

You don't need to show up with a treatment plan on day one. But knowing what you want to improve — even roughly — helps you get more out of therapy faster.

Try using **SMART goals** as a framework:

- **Specific** — "I want to manage anxiety in social situations" rather than "feel less stressed"
- **Measurable** — How will you know you've made progress?
- **Achievable** — What's realistic given where you are now?
- **Relevant** — Does this connect to something that genuinely matters in your life?
- **Time-bound** — What does progress look like at 3 months? At 6?

You can even use an AI tool to help you think through your goals before your first session. Talking it out — in any format — often helps you arrive with more clarity and confidence.

What to Expect in Your First Therapy Session

First sessions are often more conversational than people expect. Your therapist isn't there to judge you or hand you a diagnosis. They're there to understand you.

You'll likely be asked about:

- What brought you in now
- A bit of your background and history
- What you're hoping to get out of therapy
- Any previous therapy experience

You don't have to share everything on day one. A good therapist will follow your lead. The goal of the first session is to establish trust and start building a shared picture of where you are and where you want to

go.

If you leave feeling heard — even a little — that's a good sign.

Frequently Asked Questions

How do I know if I need therapy? If something is affecting your quality of life, your relationships, your work, or your sense of self — that's reason enough. You don't need to be in crisis. Therapy is just as valuable for growth and clarity as it is for managing mental health conditions. **How much does therapy cost?** Sessions typically range from \$100–\$250 without insurance. Many therapists offer sliding-scale rates. If you have insurance, call the member services number on your card and ask about behavioral health coverage and in-network providers. **What's the difference between a therapist, psychologist, and psychiatrist?** Therapists and counselors provide talk therapy. Psychologists have doctoral-level training and often do both therapy and psychological testing. Psychiatrists are medical doctors who primarily prescribe and manage medication. For most people starting therapy, a licensed therapist or counselor is the right starting point.

What if I try one therapist and it doesn't feel right? That happens — and it's okay. Fit matters. It's completely appropriate to try a few therapists before committing to one. Don't let a mismatch stop you from continuing your search. **Is online therapy as effective as in-person?** For most conditions — including anxiety, depression, and relationship issues — yes. Multiple studies support the effectiveness of telehealth therapy. The most important variable is still fit and consistency.

You're Already Closer Than You Think

If you've read this far, you're not someone who's passive about your mental health. You're thinking carefully about fit, goals, and what's been in your way — and that's exactly the kind of self-awareness that makes therapy work.

The hardest part, for most people, is making the first call. Everything after that gets easier.

Schedule your free consultation today — no commitment, just an honest conversation to see if it's the right fit.

Book free consultation →

Ready to take the first step?

A free 15-minute consult is the easiest way to see if it's the right fit — no pressure, no commitment.

Book: care.headway.co/providers/lance-nabers · **Email:** ask@lancenabers.com · **Call:** (737) 363-1206

