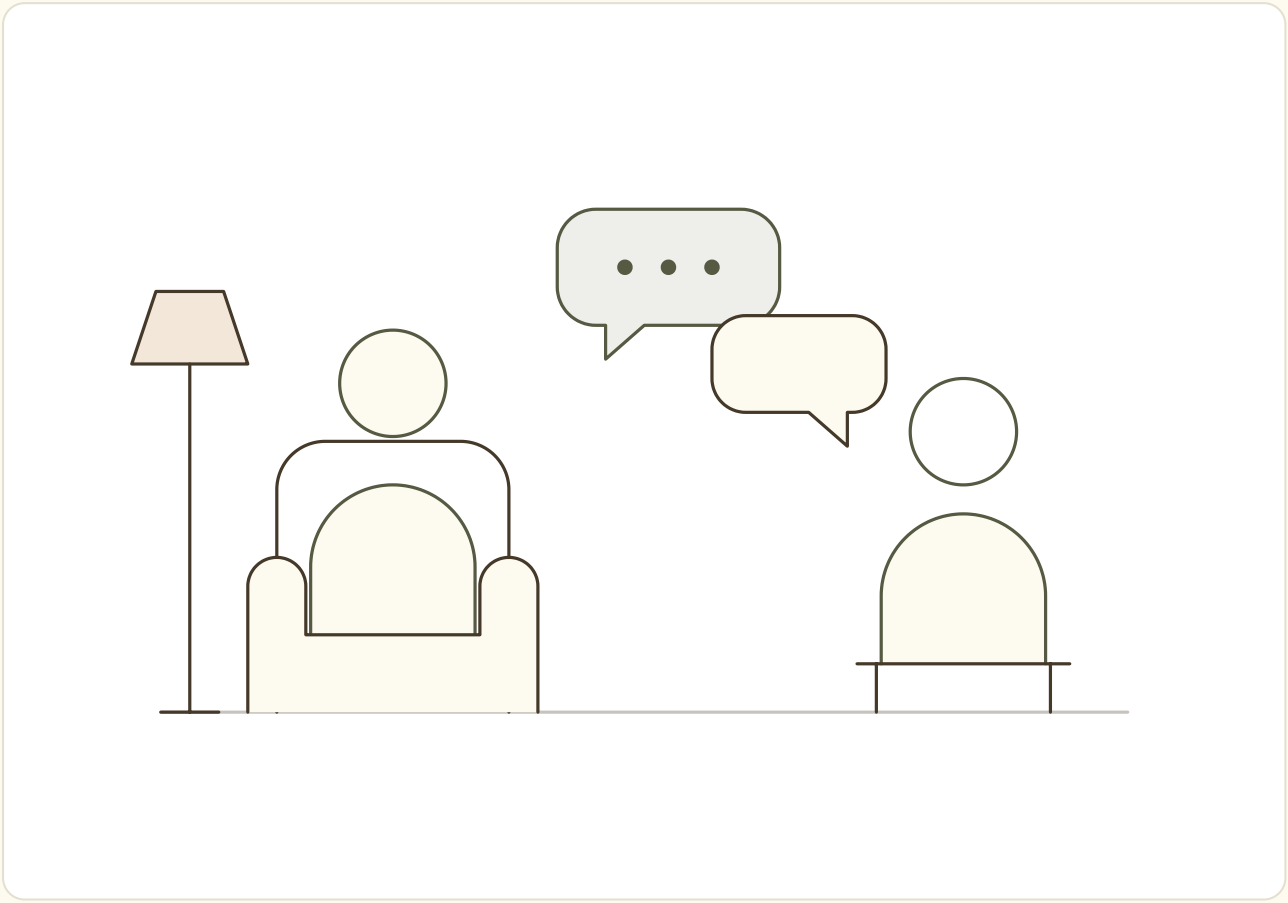
PSIRA
INSTITUT DE PSICOLOGIA
I SALUT INTEGRAL



How to prepare for your first visit to a psychologist

What happens in the first session, what to think about beforehand and which questions you can ask.

For adults seeing a psychologist for the first time, and for families bringing a son or daughter. · 7 min read

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Booking a first appointment with a psychologist is harder than it looks. Weeks, sometimes months, often go by between thinking ‘maybe I should talk to someone’ and actually getting in touch. That’s normal: you don’t quite know what to expect, explaining yourself to a stranger feels like a lot, or you wonder whether what you’re going through is ‘serious enough’.

This guide aims to take some of the uncertainty out of that first step. We explain what the first session is usually like, what can help you prepare, which questions you can ask and what to expect afterwards. You don’t need to have everything figured out before you walk in: the first visit is also there to help you sort it out.

What happens in the first session

The first session is, above all, a conversation. Your psychologist will listen, ask a few questions to understand what has brought you in and answer any questions you have about how therapy works. At Institut PSIRA it lasts 55 minutes, whether in person or online.

These topics usually come up in a first meeting:

- What’s happening and since when: what you’ve noticed, when it shows up and how it affects your daily life.
- A bit of background: work or studies, family, the people around you, your health, your sleep.
- What you’ve tried so far and what has helped, even a little.
- What you’d like to change: it doesn’t need to be a precise goal; ‘I’d like to sleep better’ or ‘I don’t want to feel like this every Sunday evening’ is already a starting point.
- Next steps: how often you might meet and how the process will be organised.

By the end of the session, you’ll usually have agreed some first goals together. It isn’t a test or an instant diagnosis: everyone is different, and properly understanding what’s going on may take more than one visit.

What you can prepare beforehand

You don’t have to prepare anything, but spending ten minutes on it in the days before can help you leave the session feeling you’ve made good use of the time. Use this list as a prompt; tick what’s useful and skip the rest.

- [ ] I’ve written down in two or three sentences why I’m asking for help now.

- [ ] I've thought about when it started and whether anything changed or happened at the time.
- [ ] I've noted recent situations where I felt bad (where I was, what was going on, what I thought and did).
- [ ] I have a list of any medication I take and any relevant reports (mental health or neurology, for example).
- [ ] I've thought about whether I've had therapy before and what did or didn't work for me.
- [ ] I've written down the questions I want to ask.
- [ ] I've checked the time, the address or the video call link, and allowed enough time to arrive without rushing.
- [ ] If the visit is online, I have a quiet place where nobody can overhear, and headphones.
- [ ] If I have private health insurance, I've checked with the centre what it covers.

Bringing written notes is perfectly normal: nerves make it easy to go blank. You can simply read them out.

Questions you can ask your psychologist

The first visit is also a chance for you to get to know your psychologist and how they work. Asking questions is a good thing and nobody will mind. A few ideas:

- ? How do you work? What approach do you use with situations like mine?
- ? How often would we meet at the start?
- ? How long does a process like this usually take? (The answer is usually approximate: it depends on the person.)
- ? What will I need to do between sessions?
- ? How will we know whether therapy is working?
- ? What happens if I need to cancel or move an appointment?
- ? Can I do some sessions online and others in person?
- ? If at some point I need an assessment, a report or coordination with another professional, how does that work?

After the first visit

After the first visit, at PSIRA we'll guide you towards the person on the team who best suits what you need. Follow-up visits start from there.

In the first few weeks you may notice very different things: relief at having talked about it, tiredness after sessions or, sometimes, a feeling that stirring things up makes you feel a bit worse before you feel better. All of this is common, and you can bring it up in the next session.

A good relationship with your therapist matters. Some signs that it's a good fit:

- You feel listened to, without judgement.
- You understand what you're doing together and why, and if you don't, you can ask.
- You can say when something didn't feel right or didn't help.
- You share some goals, even if they change over time.

If after a few sessions you don't feel comfortable, say so. Nobody will be offended: talking about it is part of therapy and, if needed, you can look for another professional on the team who suits you better.

Common worries

1. **'I don't know where to start'**
   It's one of the things people say most often at a first visit, and it's a fine way to begin. You don't need to tell it in order; your psychologist will help with questions. If you like, start with the notes you've prepared.
2. **'What I'm going through isn't serious enough'**
   You don't have to be at breaking point to ask for help. Feeling overwhelmed, going through a hard time or simply wanting to talk to a professional are reason enough.
3. **'What if someone finds out?'**
   Sessions are confidential and follow the professional code of ethics and data protection law. If you have questions about a specific situation, ask at your first visit.
4. **'I'll end up crying'**
   It may happen, and that's fine. There's time in the session to pause and pick up again.
5. **'They'll tell me what to do'**
   Therapy isn't about taking orders. It's joint work: you decide what you want to change, and your psychologist supports you with tools and an outside perspective.

If the visit is for your son or daughter

When the first visit is for a child or teenager, the family plays an important role. The centre's Child and Adolescent Unit supports parents and children from birth to 18. Before the visit, it can help to:

- [ ] Tell them where you're going and why, in words that suit their age and without making it sound like a punishment.
- [ ] Write down what worries you, since when and in which situations you notice it (at home, at school, with friends).
- [ ] Bring any reports you have from school, the paediatrician or other professionals.
- [ ] Ask the centre how the first session will be organised: who goes in and when.

From the age of 16, teenagers can use the centre's services on their own, with confidentiality and professional support.

Practical: how to book

1. **Choose how to get in touch**
   The quickest way is Doctoralia: you can see available slots in real time and you get a reminder before your visit. You can also message us on WhatsApp at +34 621 404 235 or email info@institutpsira.com.
2. **Decide whether to come in or join online**
   Your visit can be in person, at c/ Marquès de Caldes de Montbui, 123, Girona, or online. On Doctoralia, choose 'consulta online' to see video call slots.
3. **Check the price for your unit**
   The first visit costs €70 in most units and €25 with the bono psicosocial, our low-cost therapy programme. Prices for each speciality are on the specialities page of the website.
4. **Book a time that suits you**
   The centre is open Monday to Friday, 8:30 am to 8 pm. Pick a time when you won't have to rush off afterwards: it helps to have a moment to think about what you've talked about.

If you have questions before taking the step, message us on WhatsApp or by email and we'll get back to you. At Institut PSIRA we'll listen to you at your first visit and guide you towards the professional on the team who best suits what you need, in person in Girona or online.

Would you like to talk it through with someone from the team?

Book on Doctoralia or message us on WhatsApp and we'll point you in the right direction. WhatsApp +34 621 404 235 · info@institutpsira.com · c/ Marquès de Caldes de Montbui, 123 · 17003 Girona

This guide is for general information and is no substitute for an assessment by a professional. In an emergency, call 112; if you are thinking about suicide, call 024.