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Welcome to *The Verywell Mind Podcast!* I’m Amy Morin, the editor-in-chief of Verywell Mind. I’m also a psychotherapist and a best-selling author of four books on mental strength.

You’re listening to The Friday Fix! Every Friday, I share a quick mental strength strategy that can help fix the thoughts, feelings, and actions that can hold you back in life.

And the fun part is we record the show from a sailboat in the Florida Keys!

Don’t forget to subscribe to us on your favorite platform so you can get mental strength tips delivered to you every single week.

Now let’s dive into today’s episode!

Today, I’m talking about online therapy. I hear from so many people who have questions about how it works, whether it’s as helpful as in-person therapy, and the best way to find an online therapist.

So today I’m going to tell you what you need about online therapy, how to get the most of it, and when you should opt for in-person therapy instead.
But first, let me explain some of my personal experiences with online therapy. I’ve spent most of my career providing face-to-face therapy in an office. When I became an author and didn’t have time to be a full-time therapist, I offered mental strength coaching—which sometimes took place over the phone or via messaging.

I’ve also been a client of online therapy services. A few years ago, Verywell Mind asked me to test all the major online therapy services as a sort of a mystery shopper. At the time, I was a freelance writer for the site and not yet the editor-in-chief.

But I took the job and spent several months personally testing all the big therapy sites we had available then, like Talkspace and BetterHelp.

I am glad that I did that because I learned a lot about what it’s like to talk to a therapist via text messaging or how video chatting with a therapist differs from talking to someone in person.

The pandemic certainly made online therapy much more mainstream. And the good news is, it also made insurance companies start to recognize online therapy as a legitimate way for people to get help.

Some sites have also expanded into offering additional services, such as psychiatry in the event you’re interested in learning about whether medication might be right for you.

It can feel overwhelming though to find the best online therapy site for you. It feels especially overwhelming when you’re stressed out, anxious, or depressed and just want to talk to someone right away.

So to help you sort through all the online therapy sites, Verywell Mind did some research for you. This time, in addition to testing the sites for ourselves, we also surveyed people who use each website to discover how satisfied they were with the treatment they were receiving.

While some sites are great for specific issues, like substance use disorders, other sites are best for certain populations, like couples. I’ll talk more about which services we like
the best in a minute but before I do, let’s talk about some of the ways online therapy can be used.

…**a one-time consultation.** Some sites are subscription services where you pay for a month at a time and you message a therapist or video chat with them regularly. But what if you just have a mental health question or you want some strategies on how to manage your stress? Or maybe you want to find out if there’s anything you can do to get over your fear of flying because you’re supposed to go on a trip next week. Fortunately, there are several online therapy sites where you can be connected to a therapist for an appointment without paying for an ongoing subscription. Sometimes it’s helpful to hear a professional tell you that what you’re going through is normal or they may tell you what to look out for so you’ll know if you need help down the road. Or they might recommend that you start treatment now, and then you can make a decision about whether you want to see someone online or in-person. But scheduling an online appointment is often more convenient.

…**as a way to write to a therapist.** Most online therapy sites have an option to message a therapist throughout the week. Some of them allow you to do this in conjunction with having regular video chats but most allow you to just opt into a messaging service. That means you can have an app on your phone or you can use your computer to log into their site and send a secure email to a therapist throughout the week—or even throughout the day. Some people say it’s sort of like writing in a journal that talks back. On some sites, therapists will respond on a daily basis—or even more than once a day. If you enjoy writing about your feelings, this may be a good option for you.

…**as a way to talk to a therapist on the phone.** Let’s say you want to have a live conversation with someone, but you don’t want to be on camera, or you don’t have fast enough internet. There are some online therapy sites that let you schedule phone calls with your therapist.
...as a way to chat live with a therapist. Some sites allow you to schedule chat conversations with a therapist so you can have a live conversation, but you can do it by messaging back and forth. This may be a good option for people who don't feel comfortable verbalizing their feelings or who don't like to be on camera but want to get immediate feedback to their questions or concerns.

...as a way to have video appointments. You might find it's less of a hassle to just log in and talk to a therapist from home than it is to go to an office. Most online therapists allow you to schedule regular video sessions. You won't need to spend time or money commuting to appointments, the hours are often more flexible than traditional therapist's office hours, and you might not have to pay for childcare.

...you want to stay anonymous. One of the interesting aspects of online therapy is that many sites let you stay anonymous. Your therapist might not even know your real name. For some people, that can be a huge relief. I know plenty of people who came to therapy in person who were afraid of seeing someone they knew in the waiting room or they worried about how a mental health diagnosis might affect their ability to get life insurance or how it might affect their careers.

...as a way to avoid seeing someone in your community. Sometimes, people meet with their therapist in person sometimes and online sometimes if the therapist lives close by. But when you sign up for a subscription service you might get linked to a therapist who lives on the other side of your state. For some people in rural areas that can be good—it gives them access to perhaps a specialist they don't have close by.

So those are just some of the reasons why you might opt for an online therapist.

Now let's talk about how online therapy works. Depending on which site you choose to use, you may or may not pick which therapist you work with. Some sites have a computer that matches you to the therapist they think you'll work best with. Others give
you a few therapists to choose from who specialize in treating whatever issue it is you want to be seen for.

Then, you usually get to pick how you want to communicate — video, messaging, live chat, phone, etc. And you pay for your services based on your choices. Some sites offer a monthly fee for unlimited messaging other sites allow you to pay as you go for scheduling video appointments.

I suspect most people pick messaging. And when I tested online therapy sites, I found there were a lot of advantages to messaging a therapist. I could usually get a response within 24 hours — sometimes within an hour or two. That's way better than waiting a whole week in between face-to-face therapy appointments.

On the other hand, it's tough to communicate some things by message. The therapist reading your messages won't really know what your tone is when you send a message.

If you say you're having a bad day, are you really saying, “It's not the best day ever but nothing serious,” or are you saying you're in a really bad state of mind? Therapists won't always know how to interpret things and they won’t always get it right. So that can cause some frustration sometimes if your therapist grows really concerned about something or if they seem dismissive about something else.

I'm an author who spends most of my time typing — so I like messaging. But not everyone loves to communicate via writing. Fortunately, though, if you don't love to write, you do still have those other options — like video appointments. In fact, some sites let you share video messages back and forth too.

Seeing each other over video might help you establish a better rapport. But not always. One of my friends who is a therapist started doing phone calls with her clients during quarantine. And one of her clients said to her, “I feel way more comfortable talking
about things when I’m not looking at you and I can’t see your reaction.” So for that person, it was more comfortable to not be able to see each other.

If you’ve never tried therapy, or you’ve tried therapy but haven’t tried it online, you might not know your preferences until you try it.

I was somewhat opposed to online therapy until I tried it for myself. I was pleasantly surprised by how much I liked talking to an online therapist and how convenient it was.

After testing a bunch of sites, though, I concluded that not all services or online therapists are created equal. Some were a lot more helpful than others. But you’ll find that when you see a therapist in person too. Some will be a good match for you, others not so much.

A lot of new services and options have cropped up and many service providers expanded what they’re offering.

Verywell Mind did some detailed testing of online therapy services. They have a much bigger team who is doing the research and they surveyed many people who use those subscription services to better understand what types of experiences users were having.

Now, Verywell Mind is giving out awards based on the best online therapy sites. And this year, Talkspace won the award for best large service.

In addition to individual therapy, Talkspace also offers teen therapy, couples therapy, and psychiatry service.

If you’re looking to talk to someone fast and often, try BetterHelp. They won the award for best availability.
If you’re looking for a smaller company where you might get more individualized service, try E-Therapy Cafe.

And if you want to use your health insurance, try Teladoc. They’re most likely to work with your insurance company to cover or reduce your cost.

If you are interested in couples therapy, ReGain won the award for best couples service. And yes, you can do couples therapy online. This can be good for couples who aren’t able to attend in-person therapy sessions together for one reason or another.

Those are just a few examples of online therapy companies. There are tons more service providers, and you can go to verywellmind.com/onlinetherapyawards to learn more about online therapy options and the other award winners.

So does online therapy work? Yes, it works well for a lot of people. There’s research that shows it can be just as effective as face-to-face treatment in many circumstances. But it certainly isn’t for everyone and it’s not appropriate for all conditions or in all circumstances.

Some people want their home to be a comfortable place — and talking about a traumatic experience from their living room might not feel like a good idea. For other people, they may not feel like they’re able to establish an effective relationship with a therapist if they never meet in person. And being able to talk to someone you like and someone you trust is probably the most important factor in determining whether therapy is helpful.

Of course, you also need a private place to talk. If you have roommates, a partner, or kids who are always within earshot or looking over your shoulder it may be hard to do therapy online.

So while it’s not the best option for everyone, if you think it might be helpful to you, I encourage you to check out online therapy. Whether you’re struggling with depression,
you have a relationship issue, or you just feel stressed out, talking to someone online might help.

If you know someone who could benefit from learning about online therapy services, share this show with them! Simply sharing a link to this episode could help someone feel better and grow stronger.

Do you want free access to my online course? It’s called “10 Mental Strength Exercises That Will Help You Reach Your Greatest Potential.” To get your free pass, all you have to do is leave us a review on Apple Podcasts or Spotify. Then, send us a screenshot of your review. Our email address is podcast@verywell.com. We’ll reply with your all-access pass to the course!

Thank you for hanging out with me today and listening to The Verywell Mind Podcast! And as always, a big thank you to my show’s producer (whose glow-in-the-dark sneakers light up the studio when we close the curtains to record an episode), Nick Valentin.