

particularly stressful period left me lagging at work. I hadn't asked for one, but a supportive boss suggested it, and I was able to start, free of charge, as soon as I agreed. I saw that one for four weeks. The first and most significant, however, was the therapist I saw during my second year at university, aged 20. I had never felt the need to go to therapy before then, but after a bout of what I eventually realised was depression, I was willing to try pretty much anything, since bingeing on box sets and nights out didn't rid me of my low mood.

It was hard for me to muster up the courage, but I contacted the university's mental health services by email and within a week had an appointment arranged. I don't know how many students used it, but it was widely and readily available.

He didn't talk much and I saw him for only three weeks, but despite our obvious differences (like most of the student population, he was white and middle-class, and also middle-aged — I was none of those things), he understood. And not in the pitying, patronising, "nodding along without truly getting it" sense, but properly — when I explained I struggled to articulate my low mood to my emotionally reserved Nigerian parents, he spoke of the conservatism of West Africans compared with the Caribbean community, instead of, as I was accustomed to, conflating all black Brits into one brown lump. He was aware that cultural nuances meant a cookie-cutter approach would leave a great deal of mess.

We didn't get to the root of much because I decided to leave uni shortly after. But his empathy made me feel understood on several levels, for the first time in a long time.

'I really trust her expertise. I can speak freely and show my vulnerability'

Moo Jevons, 30



While there were many reasons for my seeking therapy this year, the driving force was the ending of a significant relationship last October. We had been together for almost five years, and I felt an overwhelming sense of anxiety, loneliness, low self-esteem and instability. My mother died from alcoholism five years ago, and I felt I had little solid ground to work from.

I wasn't nervous or sceptical of therapy. I had benefited from counselling in the past: once when I was 17 for issues relating to my mother, and then again, aged 23, initially due to problems with my type 1 diabetes, which led to more complex issues being exposed.

After speaking with my friends and family, I was actively encouraged and supported to return to therapy. Some of my family are in therapy, too, and quite a lot of my friends do CBT. I used a website called Welldoing.org, where you can match yourself to a suitable therapist, depending on your needs. I was matched with a psychoanalytic psychotherapist who specialises in dynamic interpersonal therapy (DIT). The focus of DIT is identifying patterns of behaviour that cause people to feel stuck or are destructive to their relationships, whether that be with a romantic partner, family member, friend or colleague.

I am on week seven of a 16-week course, with weekly sessions that cost £45 a time. I am self-employed and run my own catering business, working when I can, so the sessions are in the morning, when I tend to be less busy. My therapist is a softly spoken Irish woman in her fifties; she is gentle and I find her very empathetic. I really trust her expertise. I can speak freely and show my vulnerability with a non-judgmental, objective professional. It can be exhausting sometimes, but I generally feel a sense of relief when I leave the sessions, and I look forward to unravelling more knots each week. I know this is doing me a world of good.

'Therapists in New York are more akin to hired friends'

Josh Glancy, 32



It was the winter of 2017 when I started seeing Morty in New York. The city was pressing down on me, colder and lonelier than I had expected it to be, alienating me with its relentless energy. The talking cure seemed like a good idea, or so everyone told me.

Therapists in New York are more akin to hired friends, a person who is contractually obliged not to flake on you and is guaranteed not to spend your hour together slyly perusing Instagram. People in New York use their therapists the way you might use lip balm in cold weather, to smooth over the cracks in their tumultuous lives. I felt like I needed one too.

I went for the Upper West Side, of course, an old Jewish guy with a penchant for unfashionable Freud. Because if I'm going to do this, I thought, then I might as well do it properly.

It didn't go well. Morty was grouchy and I was often late, which made him even more grouchy. I was looking for a friend, or a tough but kindly uncle, or both, like Robin Williams in *Good Will Hunting*. Instead I got Walter Matthau in *Grumpy Old Men*. I'm not sure he

liked me very much, and he struggled with what he decided was my English ambivalence; I was always "quite" sad or "sort of" happy.

So we didn't last more than a few months, Morty and I. In truth, there wasn't all that much wrong with me. I mean, sure, I felt miserable and desperate of a Monday morning, but who doesn't? Whining to a stranger about my neuroses wasn't going to help. All I really needed was a few good mates and somebody to love, which I eventually found.

HOW TO FIND A THERAPIST

More and more people are having therapy — about 1.5m Britons have seen a private therapist in the past year, and the stigma is fading. So how do you know who you should see? Louise Chunn, the founder of welldoing.org, which matches people with a suitable therapist or counsellor, reveals what to look out for

- Make sure you see a verified therapist, a member of a professional association such as the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP), the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) or the British Psychological Society (BPS).

- The key element in successful therapy is the relationship you build with the therapist, so consider what gender, race and age group would you open up to best.

- Do you want someone who digs deep into past experience, offers behavioural tools or uses mind-body techniques such as mindfulness?

- Look for expertise in the area you are concerned about.

- Therapy associations (see above) have directories of members, and you can also find low-cost therapists via charities such as Mind and therapy training organisations.

- Many therapists offer free or lower-priced initial sessions, so try several until you feel you have found the one for you. ■