

Best for
THE EMOTIONALLY ILLITERATE
Who Ben Barnett

Barnett, otherwise known as the Dark Healer, works in mysterious ways. You: lying on a treatment table covered with flat, water-filled cushions (the 'Hydratherm system' – he helped design the waterbed-like contraption). Him: massaging you. A bit odd for a therapist, you think. But wait. If you're a bit uptight, the massage part helps physically. Barnett cradles your head in his hands, rolling it around on your neck, and reaches with his arms along the underside of your back to manipulate your spine, all the time reminding you to *breathe*. What he's really doing, though, is making you more 'malleable', more receptive emotionally. Because this is where Barnett differs from other therapists. Before you climb onto the table, he'll ask how you want to feel at the end of a session, and you might mutter something vague like 'peaceful' or 'unburdened'. And that's the last thing you'll say in the session. What Barnett does is use this seemingly random word as an insight, as a clue to what you need then and there, and also as a starting point for what he goes on to talk about – which is less of a series of structured sentences, more a wave of words. There's no rhyme or rhythm to it either. Some of what he says (in the deepest, smoothest, gravelliest voice) sort of washes over you. Some of it you take in, whether or not you realise it at the time. Some of it strikes a chord or makes you giggle. Some of it makes you cry. Go home and play back the recording he sends you – the hypnotic monologue you heard while you were lying there, half-comatose – as often as you want. And that word, that way that you wanted to feel in that first session? Well, suddenly it doesn't feel so unattainable.

From £150 for 60 minutes (gracebelgravia.com; 020 7235 8900).

Best for
THE HIGH-FLYER
Who Lucy Beresford

A former career as a banker and broadcaster means that Beresford is ideally placed to help with workplace-related issues – from performance anxiety to stress management – and assist those in senior positions or in the public eye. 'These people might be seen as visibly successful, but they often have emotional issues that they've buried,' she says. 'A lack of parental attention, perhaps, or sibling rivalry, might have given them the drive to get to where they are, but often they're reluctant to address past issues, believing that these struggles go

hand in hand with their success. There's an anxiety that if they dig too deep, they will lose that creativity, that hunger.' So her strategy is to preserve what it is that makes you 'you': building on your good points while eliminating the things that are holding you back. So appointments at her cosy Pimlico practice feel like life-coaching sessions with a bit of positive 'mindfulness' thrown in: a mixture of her working out what makes you tick and piecing together your past while she teaches you to appreciate the here and now. It might take a few sessions to get there, but when you crack it – when you let go of all the things that are holding you back, when you realise that you have the potential for an even richer life – things become easier.

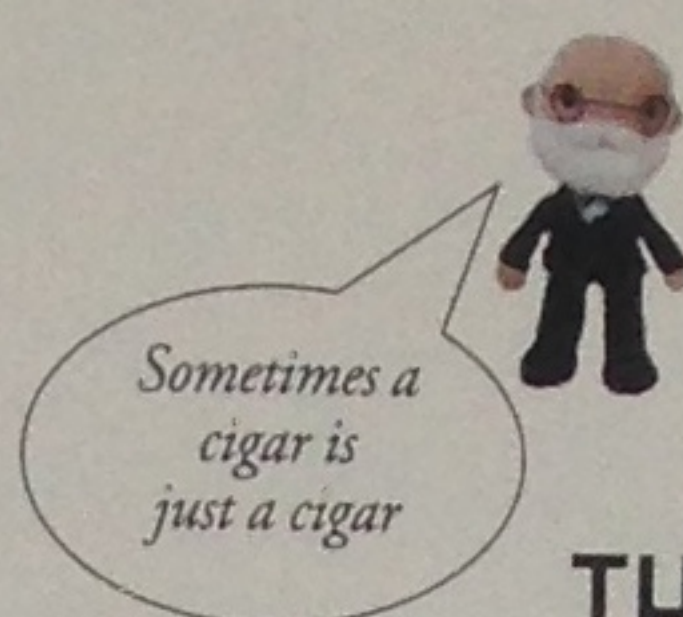
From £185 for 50 minutes (lucyberesford.co.uk; 07957 388623).

Best for
THE NOT-SO-HAPPY
Who Will Napier

It's easy to treat a problem if you know its root cause, but many people (the ones with a nice house, a stable family, a good job, no skeletons in the closet) can be on a downward spiral of self-loathing and not understand why. According to Napier, even those of us who appear to have it all are often inexplicably miserable. Simple things – like being in love or achieving great things in your career – feel undeserved and come with an irrational fear that they'll suddenly be snatched away. It's also known as impostor syndrome, and it manifests as anxiety, depression and feelings of needing to punish yourself, which Napier believes stem from poor coping mechanisms and a lack of self-belief. But his approach is simple. A single negative thought is like a firework, he explains, with the potential to explode into full-fledged panic if you don't stop it in its tracks. So he shows you how to 'defuse' the situation – and helps you realise that your thoughts are not your reality. Napier's success is partly down to his nature: he is animated and witty, yet encouraging in a non-patronising way – he'll sit in silence as you ponder a question he's asked, and then he'll get very excited when you come out with something vaguely enlightened. There's no process, no formula, to his style of therapy – but that's what makes him so damn good. Simply put, he shows you how to turn the bad things in your life into good things.

From £175 for 45 minutes (willnapier.co.uk; 07968 737678).

Neurosis is the inability to tolerate ambiguity

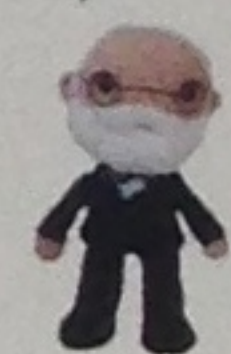


Best for
THE RECOVERING ANOREXIC
Who Shomit Mitter

A highly skilled hypnotherapist, Mitter specialises in helping those with an eating disorder to not only gain and maintain weight, but also to heal the hurt that led to the issue in the first place – whether it's a result of low self-confidence, raging perfectionism or a desperate urge to feel in control. His theory is straightforward: talking things through with a therapist can help you to understand what is happening in the here and now. To understand something, though, is not the same as to *shift* it. So you turn up at his Chiswick home, which feels safe and nurturing, and tentatively settle into a chair – and it's like floodgates opening. Mitter's gentle interrogations will have you admitting stuff that you'd tried to push to the back of your mind, stuff that you'd buried for years. His style of hypnotherapy runs deeper than repeated affirmations – expect a mixture of meditation (it allows you to view your fears from a 'still point', so that you can manage your reactions to them) and visualisation work (he has you conceive the future as you want it to be and imagine a life in which you are happy and healthy). These tools, Mitter promises, will help combat the fear of future weight gain. But it requires effort on your behalf. Only by managing the world 'in here' will you be able to cope with the world 'out there', he says. Recovery, after all, is an inside job.

From £120 for 60 minutes (shomitmitter.com; 07771 766601).

Time spent with cats is never wasted



Best for
THE CONFUSED TEEN
Who Graham Callan

Walk into Callan's spacious, high-ceilinged consulting room and you're faced with a chair and a sofa – so you can take your pick. It's a clever tactic, and it means that whatever the issue you're facing (your parents' divorce, a bereavement, a feeling of general helplessness), you can deal with it from where you feel most comfortable. A counsellor and psychotherapist, Callan is at once friendly, even fatherly. 'What do you want to talk about today?' he'll ask, and then he'll leave you to take charge. So you might start talking about your day at school, but, weirdly, he always seems to steer the conversation around to a deeper-rooted issue. At first, you don't even realise it's happening. But as he gets to the nitty-gritty, you might feel like he's opening a wound – and yet, at the same time, it feels cathartic. ▷