

How to choose a therapist

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There are many reasons for people to consider therapy. Some people will seek counseling to assist with treatable psychological issues such as: stress, anxiety, depression, alcohol and substance abuse, etc. Others are just looking for an impartial advocate to serve as a sounding board for a variety of life's difficult decisions such as: switching jobs, ending relationships, identifying unhelpful personal patterns of behavior, etc. Couples often seek assistance on issues affecting their relationship. Parents turn to therapists to help them navigate the difficult teen years with their children and/or to help the family during times of divorce or separation caused by military service. All of these involve revealing your innermost thoughts, feelings, and vulnerabilities to your therapist. Consequently, the therapist/client relationship is one of the most sacred relationships that you will ever have. So choosing the right therapist is an extremely important decision.

Whether you find a counselor by opening the phone book, getting a referral from a friend/doctor, or by contacting someone whose practice is in close proximity to your home or workplace, you should initially perform a phone interview to determine whether or not you think the person is both qualified and will be a good match for you.

There are many things to consider when deciding upon a therapist for yourself or a loved one. First, what is that therapist's educational background? Do they have a degree in clinical social work, psychology, psychiatry, religious ministry, or general counseling? Do they have a bachelor's degree only or did they go on to get a master's degree or a PhD? Second, are they licensed by the state? If so, are they in good standing? Have there been any complaints filed against them? Third, how long have they been practicing? Do they have experience dealing with the issues affecting you? Are they well-connected within the therapeutic community so that they can refer you to a "specialist" if an issue arises during your therapy that they are unable to assist you with? Fourth, are their hours convenient for you? Are they available for phone appointments? Is there someone on call on the weekends or during vacations if an emergency arises? Fifth, what does your gut tell you? Are you comfortable with this person?

During the telephone interview process, a good potential counselor should take some time to identify what your areas of concern are. He/she should also ask you some questions to gain some knowledge about you so that they can determine if they can be of assistance to you. After all this is a person that you are asking to help you with the most personal of issues. If they are not interviewing you to ensure that the match is a good one, then they are most likely not the right person for you to be seeing. The decision to enter therapy is an important one – one that was not entered into lightly – one that required a great deal of thought and courage on your part. So should you find that the therapist you chose is not a good match, do not let that discourage you from counseling. Simply end that relationship and find another therapist who will be a better fit. Good health is one of the most important gifts we can ever have – and good mental health is one area of our lives that we can easily improve and maintain with a little help from a good therapist.

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