

Finding a helping Professional

1. The process of finding a therapist can be highly anxiety producing - cut yourself some slack.
2. A sweet personality is no guarantee of ethical or effective skills,
3. One size does not fit all! A therapist who is just perfect for one person may not be a good fit for the next.
4. Word of mouth is a good starting place. Get referrals.
5. Before interviewing a therapist, be familiar with the various options available.
6. Ask yourself..... "What do I hope to gain from therapy? Can this therapist help me do that?"
7. **Interview perspective therapists**.... Many of them.
8. **Trust your instinct** - Ask yourself "Am I comfortable with THIS therapist?"
9. Ask about membership in professional organizations, specialization and licensure, and how long they have been in practice
10. Ask what it is that the therapist does that is supposed to be helpful. How is this different from how other therapists work? What should you expect?

Referrals from other professionals are a good bet. Doctors, lawyers, massage therapists, clergy, teachers, etc. often hear about the work of therapists and can assist in your search.

Interview more than one possible therapist, and be wary of any therapist who discourages this idea.

Ask what it is that the therapist does that is supposed to be helpful. How is this different from how other therapists work? What should you expect?

Does the therapist have a treatment agreement? This should cover fees, appointments, cancellation policy, limits of confidentiality, termination procedure, etc.

What do I hope to gain from therapy? Can this therapist help me do that?

Tell the therapist what you are wanting from therapy. Notice what happens then. Do you come away feeling as if the therapist heard you and responded appropriately?

Inquire as to the therapist's education, training, licensure status, and membership in a professional organization for that license. You may check online with the appropriate licensing board to see if the therapist is licensed, and if there has been any disciplinary action taken against the license.

Ask the therapist what it is that happens in his/her office that helps one feel better and what to expect in a normal session. Does the therapist focus on helping to change how you think (cognitive therapy)? Does she/he focus on working with the unconscious (psychodynamic therapy)? No single approach to therapy has been proven more effective than any other, and hundreds of approaches have been developed.

Notice how you feel in the presence of the therapist. Is this someone you can imagine seeing repeatedly and feeling respected by and comfortable with? Does the therapist pay attention to you? Is he/she cold? Too effusive, empathic? Too sure of herself/himself? Is she/he defensive about your questions? Does the office have an atmosphere that is appealing? Regardless of a therapist's training or philosophy, the therapist/client relationship is largely what determines whether you will think the therapy is effective or not.

Is the therapist experienced in working with issues similar to yours? While it is certainly not necessary for a therapist to have personally experienced whatever you are going through, you need some reassurance that what you are bringing to the table is not beyond the scope of competence of the therapist.

As an informed consumer, you should ask the therapist questions throughout your treatment about the process of therapy. You have a right to know what is happening and why.

The Helping Professionals: Who They Are – What They Do

Helping professionals work in many settings, such as schools, mental health centers, clinics, employee assistance programs, private and group practice, hospitals, nursing homes, and prisons, residential centers, partial care organizations, family or social service agencies, and university medical centers or teaching hospitals. The promotion and enhancement of healthy, satisfying lifestyles are the goals of all helping professional regardless of where services are provided.

Psychiatrist is:

- a **medical doctor** who specializes in psychiatric/emotional disorders
- licensed to practice medicine and has certain **areas of expertise**
- can evaluate and diagnose and treat mental disorders using medication and talk therapy,
- Is trained to work with psychological problems associated with medical disorders
- **Can prescribe medications.**

Psychologists:

- conduct psychotherapy (**talk therapy**) with individuals, groups, &/or families
- have different specialties and often **collaborate with psychiatrists**
- if licensed, a clinical psychologist has completed a doctoral degree and a national professional licensure examination.

Psychiatric Nurse is:

- trained in prevention, treatment, & rehabilitation of mental-health problems
- a registered professional nurse who has a master's or doctoral degree
- able to conduct individual, family & group therapy, or work in consultation, education & administration.

Social Workers:

- have master's or doctoral degrees, completed supervised fieldwork, and should be licensed/certified.
- Conduct individual, family, & group counseling & psychotherapy
- are trained in client-centered advocacy (ie. referral, direct intervention with governmental and civic agencies, & accessing community resources).

Mental Health Counselors

- have a Bachelor's or a Master's degree & should pass a national examination to be certified
- provides counseling services that involve psychotherapy, human development, learning theory.
- Clinical counselors have earned at least a master's degree, had supervised experience,

Case Managers and Outreach Workers:

- Coordinate medical care, social services, and assistance from a variety of agencies, including housing, Social Security, vocational rehabilitation, and mental health.
- monitor clients' needs, involving appropriate agencies, advocating for clients.
- can be nurses, social workers, or mental health workers
- often work in teams include people recovering from mental illness functioning as peer counselors.

Source: <http://store.mentalhealth.org/publications/allpubs/cmh94-5001/treatment.asp#28h>