

Choosing A Therapist

How do I choose a counselor or therapist?

You can talk to friends and relatives or to your family physician. You can also contact your local mental health association, the local branch of the American Psychological Association, the National Association of Social Workers, the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy or you can contact your religious leader for a referral for pastoral counseling.

What questions should I ask a potential counselor?

When you select a counselor, it's a good idea to arrange for a phone or face-to-face interview to give you a chance to meet the person and see if his or her style meshes with your own. Here are some questions you might want to ask potential counselors:

- What type of counselor are you and what is your training?
- Are you licensed or certified?
- Do you belong to a professional association and, if so, which one(s)?
- Are you in good standing professionally, or are you under any sort of disciplinary order?
- Is your practice affiliated with anyone else, or with any organization? If so, what is the arrangement? If the counselor works for a clinic, how long has he or she worked there?
- What is your approach to counseling or therapy?
- What are the costs and will my insurance cover them? Do you accept medical assistance. Do you have a sliding fee scale?
- How much experience do you have with problems or situations like mine?
- If you formulate a diagnosis of my problem, will you inform me?
- How often will we meet and how long do you generally end up working with someone like me?
- What problems or risks are likely in dealing with a problem like mine?
- Will you be willing to jointly establish goals for my counseling and to engage in periodic evaluations of our work together?
- Are you available for emergency consultation if I should experience a crisis?

What are some of the qualities I should look for in a counselor?

- **Training:** On the whole, you're better off with counselors with who have professional credentials.
- **Experience:** In order to work well with you a counselor should have experience with the type of problem you're experiencing.
- **Life Experience:** A counselor's life experience should be somewhat similar to your own. There are limits to this. A counselor doesn't need to have lost a spouse to understand grief, but he or she should have enough life knowledge to understand your problems.
- **Clarity about Goals -A** good counselor should be willing to negotiate the goals for counseling with you.
- **Review of Goals:** The counselor and the client periodically review the goals and take stock of the progress they've made.
- **Response to Feedback:** A good counselor gives straightforward answers to questions, discuss problems and takes complaints seriously.
- **Use of Consultants -A** counselor should have a consultant or supervisor to discuss their cases with and give him or her perspective on handling difficult situations.
- **Personal Boundaries:** A counselor may share some relevant details about their his or her own life, but he or she should not spend the session discussing personal problems.
- **Seduction :** A counselors should not play seductive games, talk seductively or dress in a seductive manner.
- **Touch:** A good counselor uses touch carefully. Although he or she may hug a client, this should never done without permission.

- **Professionalism:** A counselor should be warm and friendly but not so involved in your life that he or she lends or borrows money from you, trades services for work or tries to run your life.
- **Credit for Changes:** A counselor should encourage your independence. If you make changes, they are due to your efforts. If your major problems are resolved or improved, the counselor should begin talking about ending your therapy.
- **Compatibility:** Within a few sessions you should begin to feel comfortable with your counselor and develop a sense of trust and a sense that you are both working together. This is one of the most important aspects of counseling and, if it is absent, counseling is unlikely to be successful.

Are there risks of counseling?

- That it will be emotionally painful. As you examine personal problems you may become aware of things that are quite troubling or painful. This can lead to an increase in your distress or anxiety at least for a time.
- That the people in your life may resist your efforts to change. If you begin to change it could affect your family relationships and cause upset. When one person in a marriage changes and the other is unwilling to make changes, a divorce may result.
- That counseling or therapy may not help, despite your expenditure of time, money, and effort.
- That you may mention to someone that you are in counseling or therapy and the other person will see this negatively, rather than positively. There is still, at times, a stigma attached to getting help, and some insurance carriers may limit coverage because of this.