

Finding a Therapist

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by Jes

Finding a therapist is an important and often frightening part of the recovery process. It can be very intimidating to search for the person with whom you are going to share parts of your life that you may never have disclosed before. However, a relationship with the right professional can be richly rewarding, allowing you to make leaps and bounds as you heal and grow as a person.

As you start looking, you may want to ask friends, family, your rape crisis center, a trusted clergy member, or your doctor for recommendations. If you belong to a managed health care organization, you can look on their website to find out if mental health services are available, or you can narrow down your search by using an Internet-based therapist locator like this one found at Psychology Today.

http://therapists.psychologytoday.com/rms/prof_search.php

Selecting Candidates

It is hard to know where to start when you have a list of names in front of you. You can narrow down your choices by considering a few factors.

- · How far can you drive to therapy appointments?
- · Would you be more comfortable with a male or female practitioner?
- · Do you need the therapist to speak a different language?
- · Does the clinician have experience addressing these issues you are bringing to therapy?

As you search, you should also be aware of the many qualifications that mental health professionals may possess. Keep in mind that while your therapist's training will inform his or her therapeutic style, the title the therapist holds is only one factor in this important decision. What is really important is finding someone with whom you connect and can trust is able to treat the problems you want to address. However, it is important to find someone

with credentials; it is a little known fact that anyone can call themselves a therapist, regardless of their training. You can find a list of recognized titles and licenses that mental health professionals may hold and a little information about them here:

<http://pandys.org/forums/index.php?showtopic=77835>

Therapists use different approaches. Some therapists may use a combination of approaches while others will stick strictly to one method. A variety of methods are effective, but you may find that you have a preference. You can find a list of approaches and a little information about them here:

<http://www.psychologytoday.com/pto/methods.html>

Choosing the Therapist

Once you've narrowed your search down to a few candidates, go ahead and contact your first choice. If you are connected to an answering machine or service, just leave your name and number. It may help you to have a few prepared questions written down in front of you. Ideas include:

- . What experience do you have treating [what you want to work on]?
- . What therapeutic techniques do you use?
- . What are your fees?
- . What insurances do you accept?
- . Is a sliding fee scale a possibility?

If you are comfortable with the answers the therapist gives you, schedule an appointment to meet. If you are not, it is okay to say that you have a few more candidates to call and thank the person for his or her time. If that is the case, call the next person on your list.

Meeting Your Therapist

The big day is here! You've done your homework and have scheduled an appointment to see someone with whom you think you might build a therapeutic relationship. When you walk in

to the office, you will probably be nervous. You can find some tips to help you through this appointment here:

<http://pandys.org/forums/index.php?showtop...mp;#entry734554>

As you sit down with the practitioner, ask yourself if you feel comfortable. A therapist will assume a very important role in your life, your growth as a person and your healing process, so you will want someone with whom you have a connection. You will also want to know if the therapists' values are in alignment with yours. For instance, if you are gay or lesbian, it would be hard for you to establish a relationship with someone who disapproves of your sexual orientation. If you are not religious, it might also be difficult for you to work with a practitioner who thinks that religion should be an important part of the healing process. Another consideration is whether or not the therapist is appropriately challenging. A clinician should be able to supportively help you to change unhealthy behaviors and thought processes rather than an agreeing with everything you say. At the same time, a therapist who is overly aggressive won't help you either. Therapy is hard work and it is important to work with someone who will facilitate your efforts.

As You Proceed

Many practitioners recommend giving a therapist three sessions before making a decision about whether or not this is the right person for you. The initial assessment period can be anxiety producing and somewhat awkward feeling, so if you aren't sure about a therapist, stick with it. However, if a therapist says something that makes you distinctly uncomfortable or you are sure that you'll be unable to make progress with this person, it is okay to continue your search. It may take you more than one try to find the right therapist. Just as you might try a few different hairstylists or mechanics, you may need to call or meet with more than one practitioner before you find the right one. Keep at it until you meet with someone with whom you have a rapport.

As you build your relationship with your therapist, remember that you have the right to be heard and respected throughout the process. At times, therapy may become difficult. That is because you are working toward change and change is challenging for everyone! It can

help to open up a dialogue with your practitioner by saying, "When you said ABC, I felt XYZ". Profound growth can result from working through the challenging moments in therapy, so give your practitioner a chance to listen to you and respond. Stick with the process and therapy can be a transformative experience. Good luck!

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