

Finding Your Right Therapist

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Speaking from my own personal experience, just considering going to a therapist may be a grim thought. It may take weeks, or in my case months, to finally make that important decision to find someone with whom you can trust enough to share your problems. In the end, I went online and found a few names, read each therapists' professional biography, chose the one who "felt" right, and took the plunge. The first therapist I tried was an excellent match for my personality and my social anxiety problems. My life and problems improved, gradually.

I look back now and shake my head, smiling. I got lucky. In my years of clinical training as a therapist, I have heard and read how people can go from one therapist to the next without experiencing much success. Then, when I started taking on my own clients, I listened as they described similar scenarios of trying different counselors and feeling disappointed. Please, do not get me wrong, I do not think that these former therapists somehow were incompetent at their jobs. Nor do I think that these clients were not trying to change. Rather, I firmly believe the most important factor for therapeutic success is the rapport between the counselor and the client. To a degree, having rapport with your therapist is a bit like dating. You get out there and have few sessions. If they are not a fit for you, it is okay for you to move on and try another. However, when we date, we do not typically go in blindly. We use our previous dating experience to guide us. When deciding upon a therapist, our previous "dating experience" should ideally come from doing research. Our level of success will come from how well we do this research - I clearly do not expect everyone to get as lucky as I did. Therefore, I thought it might help if I provide some suggestions on how to find your right therapist.

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1. Word of Mouth

Word of mouth from family and friends may be an option for some. For example, if you know someone who has ever been in therapy, and they speak well about the therapist and the progress they have made, then perhaps asking for a referral list from that professional is a good idea. Once you have that referral list, proceed using some of the suggestions below. Due to [dual relationship complications](#), I recommend against taking on your family member's or friend's therapist.

2. Hunting Online

In our internet age, searching for a therapist online has become easier and can produce success. For instance, I found all my potential therapists online. Once I had my list, I narrowed it down to the counselor I eventually chose. Using sources such as Google, Google Maps, [PsychologyToday](#), or even Yelp will give you a long list (please remember that not all effective and trustworthy therapists add themselves to every potential source).

Unfortunately, depending on how you search, your list can get overwhelmingly long and confusing very quickly. Therefore, I recommend using certain helpful criteria and keywords. Please see [Online Searches for Therapists](#) for specific helpful suggestions.

3. Type of Therapist

Depending on the severity, symptoms, complexity, and history of issues (and previous therapists you may have seen), you will want to consider what type of counseling professional you want to see. Different types of therapists may match your needs more effectively.

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For example, if you require medication to manage your problems, a psychiatrist is likely more qualified to help you than your regular doctor or physician's assistant. Or, if you have severe depression or PTSD, you may want to see both a psychiatrist (to prescribe and manage medication effectively in occasional shorter visits) and a psychologist (whose increased level of knowledge may be better equipped to handle your complex needs). Or finally, if you have anxiety, a phobia, moderate depression, or anger management issues, then a psychotherapist will be very capable of providing effective therapy. Please keep in mind that seeing more than one type of therapist at the same time, while not always necessary, is certainly common for many problems. For more information on the distinction between therapists, please see [Types of Therapists](#).

4. Therapeutic Orientation

There are many kinds of therapy. In my opinion, this is a good thing. Clinical psychology, in general, continues to evolve, looking for better and more effective ways to help those with mental and behavioral problems. Essentially, when a therapist works with you, they are using their theory (or theories) to guide them as they interpret your behavior, thoughts, and feelings. They develop a flexible framework on how to navigate your journey from the first session to the last. The type of therapy he or she provides should be able to fit your personality and problems. There is not enough space to explain them all here, but please see [Types of Therapy](#) for more information.

However, as research has shown, the type of therapy chosen may matter less than the [therapeutic rapport](#) developed between the therapist and client. As a client, you need to feel comfortable with the techniques being recommended and the professional with

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whom who you are spending so much time. It should probably make sense when you think about it. If you do not like spending time with your therapist, then you will likely not want to try some of the suggestions that he or she suggests. And if you do not try their suggestions, then you are much more likely to remain stuck with your problems.

5. Affordability

Many people will typically use their insurance to cover the cost for mental health care, as they do their medical and dental care. If you choose to use your insurance, I recommend you verify the following as soon as you can: 1) what types of therapeutic professionals your insurance accepts, 2) what the diagnoses need to be, 3) what kind of documentation you need, 4) how many sessions it covers, and 5) what your deductible and copays will be. The sooner you know this information, the sooner you can use it in your search for a therapist. The last thing you want to do is find a professional you are ready to commit to and highly trust, just to discover that your insurance company does not accept him or her.

Of course, insurance coverage is not always possible. Other options that you can consider are: 1) do they have a sliding scale (reduced fees) due to financial difficulties, 2) do they accept out of pocket payments, 3) do they accept payment plans, and 4) do they know other professionals who have more cost effective rates (i.e., referrals to other clinics, referrals to therapists in training).

6. Testing it Out

After you have researched therapies, therapists, and costs, whether

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online or by word of mouth, you will hopefully find yourself with a shorter list of therapists. At this point, I suggest testing it out. Call and ask questions about any of the above details. Do not feel pressured to make an appointment if the counselor does not seem to be a good fit. Listen to your intuition and call the next name on your list. When you are confident with a therapist, call and set an intake appointment. During this first appointment discuss your concerns, ask questions, and listen to what he or she has to say. Be prepared to fill out several forms (even before you meet your therapist) and answer a lot of questions. If you still feel comfortable after the initial session, great, keep going.

7. Final Thoughts

Above I mentioned therapy is like dating. This likely has some accuracy. For example, if you feel as though your sessions are not working, mention that to your therapist and give it one or two sessions before moving on to the next one. However, like dating, YOU must be ready to make an effort with the therapy homework. Unfortunately, if you are not prepared to do some work, then you are unlikely to see the results and changes you want. If you do find yourself repeatedly moving from one professional to another, then I suggest creating a list of all the things you have liked and not liked about previous therapists. Share that list with the next therapist you see and change things up a bit.

This was a lot of information and I thank you for taking the time to read it all. I sincerely hope that it has given you some ideas, encouragement, and propels you forward to finding your right therapist.

Good luck!