



Finding the Right Therapist for You

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Most people seeking psychotherapy choose a therapist when they are experiencing a crisis or when they have difficulty controlling their thoughts, emotions, or behaviors. It's hard to think clearly in these moments, so the idea of finding a good therapist might feel overwhelmingly complicated.

Getting a recommendation from a friend or colleague may seem like a good idea, but often people don't want to discuss this need except with those closest to them. Recommendations from a primary care physician can be helpful, but the physician may be connected to an HMO that requires them to refer to a specific person or group. In addition, the wide variety of qualified psychotherapists (psychologists, social workers, licensed professional counselors, and others) can be confusing.

Here are some suggestions to help you find a therapist right for you:

1. Ask about the professional organizations to which the therapist belongs. Most reputable therapists will belong to one or more organizations that govern the ethics of practice for their profession.
2. Ask if the therapist will give you a few minutes (ten or less) on the phone to discuss the way they practice psychotherapy. The therapist's philosophy of counseling and their approach to helping clients can be an important factor in selecting a therapist that is a good match.
3. Ask about fees, referrals needed to begin the therapy process, and authorizations that you must obtain before beginning treatment. If you have a mental health insurance benefit that you want to use, be sure you have followed all of the requirements of that particular health plan, or you could be responsible for payment of all fees. The individual or organization you select should know about the approvals you must obtain prior to the beginning of treatment, but it remains your responsibility to ensure you have followed the procedures required by your insurance company if you wish to utilize your insurance benefit.
4. Be as open and honest as you can be about what you need from therapy. Having "hidden agendas" in therapy will only hamper your progress and make it more difficult to determine if your therapist will be helpful.

5. At the time of the initial interview, ask if the therapist can help you establish both short- and long-term goals for psychotherapy. Psychotherapy without goals is similar to taking a road trip without knowing a destination. You will never know when you do arrive unless you have specific and measurable goals.
6. Perhaps most important is this: If you don't feel as if you have a connection with your therapist by the end of the first forty-five to fifty-minute interview, don't continue to pursue this therapy relationship. The reasons for the lack of a connection aren't your fault and they aren't the fault of the therapist. Sometimes, it just isn't a good match. And with psychotherapy, the relationship is what it is all about. It's often a good idea to meet with several therapists so you can find the one who helps you feel the most comfortable and able to share your feelings.

Talk to someone who can help! To find a licensed psychologist near you, use PPA's Psychologist Locator at <https://www.papsy.org/locator>. For information on other mental health topics, go to <https://www.papsy.org>, then "Resources" and then "Public Resources". PPA offers these articles for informational purposes only; they are not a substitute for professional diagnosis and treatment.