

10 Tips for choosing a Therapist

Making the decision to find help is important. But how? Here are a few tips:

1. Forget the yellow pages. Does anyone even use the yellow pages anymore? If you're under 40 years old you have no idea what I'm talking about. A therapist who still advertises via the yellow pages is either targeting an older demographic, a few steps behind in modern culture or both.

2. Ask a professional you already work with and trust. A pastor, accountant, lawyer, dentist, physician –professionals understand the importance of confidentiality and are usually in the know when it comes to counselors, psychologists, and psychiatrists.

Note: *When asking for a referral to a mental health therapist you do not have to go into the details of why you're looking for a someone unless you want to. It's enough just to say, "I'm sorting through some personal issues and I'd like to consult a professional counselor. Can you recommend anyone?"*

3. Consider asking friends or family members if they can recommend someone. Just be sure they will be discrete, supportive and not intrusive.

4. Use a known therapist as a resource. If you have a friend or a friend's friend who is a therapist, ask them for a referral. Therapists refer to one another all the time. You may not want to see your brother or sister's therapist (for obvious reasons), however, this therapist can provide you with a few names of good, qualified therapists in your area.

5. Use resources at work. Many places of employment have what's called an [Employee Assistance Program](#) (EAP). These services might be in-house or out-sourced but the purpose of EAPs is to provide emotional support and counseling for employees in complete privacy and as part of the employee's benefit package. EAPs are often part of the Human Resource department so ask there if your company has an EAP and how to access it. HR, by the way, is mandated to keep confidentiality in most cases and they can refer you to a therapist in the community who is credentialed through your health insurance.

6. Schools and Universities are resources. Your child's school is likely to have a school counselor or nurse and that person knows therapists in your district to refer you or your child to, if that is what's needed. Universities and colleges are investing more

and more in their campus mental health services. Counseling Centers (often part of Health Services under the Student Affairs department) on campus have qualified psychologists and social workers on stand-by to help with a wide range of situations for current students. Like EAPs, if you need longer term services beyond what they can provide they will see to it that you are linked properly for your continuity of care. As an alum or faculty you should be able to access the counseling center as a resource for a referral.

7. Use your insurance company. The customer service department of your insurance company can be a truly helpful resource. Insurance companies love to make quality referrals since it is in your best interest. They can direct you to therapists who have been vetted and who specialize in what you need.

8. Use the Internet. The difference between the web and the yellow pages is that, for the therapist, listing on reliable websites is not nearly as expensive AND reliable sites require a minimum of professional qualifications to be listed. A good listing on a medical professional review site (e.g. WebMD or Psychology Today) provides you with information regarding the professional's qualifications, what areas of expertise they may have, how long they've been in practice.

9. Do a Google search. Once you have a few names go ahead and Google them. If they have a blog or a website, explore them. Often you can get a sense of a therapist's style and personality based on their web presentation or what they've written about (blogged) or talked about (podcast).

10. Don't limit yourself.

- ***What if I want Christian based professional counseling and there are no counselors near me?*** Every professional counselor is mandated by law to “do no harm” and to respect the religious beliefs of clients. You will also find that there are many counselors who practice Christian faith. A simple phone call or email to the potential counselor while you are in considering your first appointment should let you know where this professional stands. But don't set limits on counseling based on your estimation of a counselor's spirituality. Sometimes a good sounding board is enough. A professional can offer feedback to blind spots that you don't see and alternative solutions that do not compromise your personal convictions.
- ***Don't be narrow with professional titles.*** The key is in the designation of “licensed”. A licensed psychologist, social worker or marriage and family therapist are all legitimate options. “Do they provide psychotherapy?” is the main question. Studies show that once core requirements are met in education and certification, the effectiveness of a therapist is not dictated by what letters they have after their name.
- ***Virtual counseling.*** If you live in an area where it is difficult to find a mental health professional locally, or if you have limited mobility, you can always turn to

tele-sessions/virtual sessions using video conferencing or in some cases telephone sessions. To bill insurance, the provider must be licensed within your home state. There must also be a security agreement in place where the therapist can guarantee privacy on his end of the connection.

One last thought in your search for a therapist: Try to gather at least two or three names from any given source. That way you can cross-reference, and have choices if one doesn't work out, moved out of town, retired or just doesn't suit you. You have a right, even a responsibility to yourself, to be picky.