

How To Choose a Therapist

At some point in everyone's life, they may feel overwhelmed. Therapy can be incredibly helpful. Engaging in therapy can help you look at your problems in a different way, help you gain insight into your thoughts, feelings and behaviors, help you develop new coping skills and strategies, and help you change how you feel.

Psychotherapy is a collaborative process in which the therapist and client work together to help change feelings and attitudes and to develop healthier patterns of behavior. While a therapist has training and

expertise (in human behavior, mental health assessment, diagnosis, treatment modalities, and behavior change), you know yourself and your experiences best. A therapist cannot just "fix" the problems you are experiencing, but rather works with you to build a shared understanding of those problems and of the solutions that might work best. For therapy to be successful, you must be a willing and engaged partner in this work. There are a number of factors to consider when choosing a therapist or counselor:

Your level of comfort and rapport with a therapist are extremely important. It is OK for you to call and speak with a therapist before you set up an appointment with them.

- Have them describe their style of work and see how that resonates with you.
- Notice how you feel when you talk with them. It may take a few sessions to determine how comfortable you are with a therapist.
- If you decide it isn't a good fit, it's OK to say so and find a new therapist. It's best to share with your therapist what you're looking for and why you feel they are not a good fit, because they can often refer you to other therapists that may be a better match.



Their level of experience is also important.

- It is impossible to find someone who specializes in people with your exact problems because there is no one else with your exact problem. But you should look for someone who has experience working with the issues that bring to therapy.
- Ask if they have experience working with people of your identity (ethnicity, race, sexuality, gender, gender identity, etc.), or who have struggles similar to your own (depression, anxiety, relationship issues, etc.)
- Research shows that better client outcomes are associated with therapists who have been practicing in the field longer.

Training and credentials matter.

- Go with the most skilled professional you can afford.
- Psychologists spend an average of seven (7) years in graduate education training and research before receiving a doctoral degree (Ph.D., Psy.D.). As part of their professional training, they must complete a supervised clinical internship and at least one year of post-doctoral supervised experience before they can practice independently.
- Licensed Clinical Social Workers have received a Master's degree following approximately two (2) years of graduate education training. They often have specialized training in psychotherapy. In order to become licensed, they typically have to complete supervised clinical experience of up to two (2) years.
- Master's Level Counselors have received a Master's degree in a field like Psychology, but have more limited training in and supervision. In order to become licensed, they typically have to complete supervised clinical experience of up to two (2) years.
- Ensure that they are licensed by the state in which they practice. You can verify licensure in the state of Colorado at: <https://www.colorado.gov/dora/licensing/Lookup/LicenseLookup.aspx>
- Avoid counselors who have little or no formal training.



Theoretical orientation reflects the ways that a therapist thinks about the problems someone is facing and guides their thinking about what treatment will be most helpful. Examples of theoretical orientation are cognitive-behavioral, behavioral, psychodynamic, and interpersonal. Most clinicians these days subscribe to an "eclectic" approach, which means that they may pull useful strategies from a variety of orientations and tailor their approach to the problems you present and the way you relate.

- Be wary of therapists who are too identified with a particular orientation, as they may be more likely to decide how to treat you before really understanding you and your issues.
- Be wary of therapists to claim to be "experts" in many forms of therapy. No one can be expert in everything.



Gender, race, and identity may be important considerations for you, depending on your background or life experiences. Particularly as you begin therapy, it's most important for you to feel comfortable talking to your therapist. If you experience identity-based oppression, it may be important to choose someone who has experience in working with those issues. If you know you'll feel most open with someone of a particular gender or race, choose someone of that identity. Sometimes when people are working through trust issues with people of one gender or identity group, it may be important to work with a therapist of that group as treatment progresses.

Cost is often an important consideration when choosing a therapist.

- Insurance companies typically have a network of mental health providers that they will cover, so check your insurance company's preferred provider network.
- Some providers will utilize sliding scale fees in order to make services affordable for more people. Ask about fees when you call for an appointment.

Get referrals.

- Ask friends and family members if they have been in therapy and liked their therapist.
- Ask your primary care physician for referrals.

For more information on how to choose a therapist, check out:

Psych Central: <http://psychcentral.com/therapist.htm>

American Psychological Association: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/choose-therapist.aspx>

Psychology Today: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/psychologically-minded/201309/how-choose-therapist>