

How To Choose a Therapist

Once you make the difficult but important decision to go to therapy, whether for you individually, or for your child, family, or for couples therapy, it is important to find the right fit for your needs and goals. Not all therapists are the same, as not all therapeutic approaches are the same. All the letters after the name can be confusing. The following is a list of some of them for you to reference. Depending on the state you live in, the letters for a particular license may be different, but the educational and supervision requirements are either identical, or very similar.

The following all require a Graduate School Master's Degree

- LPC (Licensed Professional Counselor)
- LMHC (Licensed Mental Health Counselor)
- LCMHC (Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor)
- LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker)
- LICSW (Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker)
- LMFT (Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist)
- LPA (Licensed Psychological Associate)
- ANP (Advanced Nurse Practitioner-can provide psychotherapeutic services if they received specialized training following their advanced Master's Degree)

Sub-Categories

LCAS (Licensed Clinical Addictions Specialist)
LPCS (Licensed Professional Counselor Supervisor)

The following require a Doctoral Degree

- PhD (Psychologist, a Doctor of Philosophy Psychology)
- PsyD (Psychologist, Doctor of Psychology)
- DSW (Doctoral Degree in Social Work)

The following requires a Medical Degree and 4- residency in psychiatry training

- Licensed Psychiatry

Sometimes, you may feel limited by the therapists who are providers on your insurance plan. This is an important consideration, because insurance may cover some or all of the cost of therapy. However, if the therapists that are providers for the insurance company are not the best fit, or are not trained in the kind of therapeutic approach you want and need, it may be in your best interest to look elsewhere.

Interviewing Therapists Before Making A Choice

It is important to come up with a list of questions to ask a potential therapist. The following are some possible questions:

1. **Do you take my insurance?** Some insurance policies will only cover a therapist who is already in their network. Other policies will cover out-of-network, sometimes at a different rate. If you choose an out-of-network therapist, find out if your insurance will still cover the cost.

2. **What license(s) do you have to provide therapy, and how many years have you been in practice?** Number of years practicing does not necessarily equal quality.
3. **What experience to you have working with my (or my child's) issues?** Having not only training but experience in the areas of your situation/issues would be important.
4. **What approach(es) do you use when providing therapy for issues such as mine (or my child's)?** There are many types of therapeutic approaches that address specific issues, but each person or family is unique, and sometimes an integrative approach is best. If the therapist discusses approaches that you are not familiar with, ask her/him to explain the process to you so you can make a fully informed decision.
5. **How long will therapy take?** This is a difficult question to answer and a good therapist will tell you that. There are many possible variables that can either progress the client quickly, or can slow progress to a crawl. Good therapists will work to provide the most effective, and shortest term therapy possible, and will talk with you frequently about the progress and direction of therapy.
6. **In working with a client, do you tend to be more directive or are you more like a consultant in your approach?** There are times when having a directive therapist can be the most helpful, but there are also times when it is good to have more of a guide on your path, when you are more in control.
7. **What types of things would you expect me to do between sessions?** This can vary from written and/or reading homework, to practicing relaxation techniques, researching a topic on-line through articles, You-Tube videos, or websites.
8. **What happens if I miss an appointment?** Again, the answers will vary, but most therapists require at least a 24-hour cancellation notice, or you may incur a charge. Most therapists are also flexible with such things as emergency situations, car issues, and sudden illness.
9. **What happens if I am late for a session?** Most therapists have a policy that if a client is not present by 15 minutes past the session, then the appointment is cancelled unless you called ahead and made other arrangements. Again, you may incur a charge.
10. **What if I am having a lot of problems between sessions, what are my options?** Most therapists have a policy of returning phone messages within 24 hours. However, most private therapists are NOT set up as crisis services, and in the event of a mental health crisis, clients are instructed to call 911 or go to the local Emergency Dept. of the hospital
11. **What happens when you are on vacation or out-of-town?** Some therapists will have a colleague that is willing to cover for them, when out-of-town or on vacation. But, it is important that if a client is having a mental health crisis, they should call 911 or go to the nearest hospital Emergency Room for help.
12. **What do you consider to be your specialty areas?**
13. **Do you have an age minimum or maximum for the clients you will take in your practice?**
14. **If I want to bring someone else to a session, would that be a problem?**
15. **What would I have to do, if anything, to prepare for the first session?**
16. **Do you think you can help me?**