

How to find the right therapist.

Whether you're coping with grief, trauma, or relationship issues, or want treatment for a mental illness, finding a helpful therapist can make a big difference in your journey.

Here are some helpful tips to use.

1. Interview your potential new therapist.
2. Ask for a single visit or phone call to interview them. Therapists also want to know if you are the fit for them.
3. Ask questions about the things that matter to you.

The first meeting or consult should be a time to determine if this is a good fit for you. When you meet your therapist, whether it's online, on the phone, or in person, it's not uncommon to completely forget every question you wanted to ask.

To make sure you have the information you need to make a good decision, keep paper and a pen, or a notes app, handy for a few days before your meeting. Jot down questions as they come to you.

What exactly is a consult?

Consultations are generally informal. It's a chance to get to know each other. It's also a chance for the therapist to get a sense of what your presenting problem is and make sure they feel they can competently treat you. A therapist has an ethical duty to refer you to other therapists that they think would be a better fit for you if they don't feel able to treat you.

You should not expect any real therapy to take place in the consultation. Therapy starts in the first full session after the consult. One of the most important parts of a consultation is that it gives the client a chance to ask the therapist some questions. As the client, you should feel empowered to ask the therapist any questions you have, especially if getting the answers will help you to feel more comfortable talking to the counselor.

Be able to talk about symptoms, what you're experiencing that is causing you to seek help. Below are some examples.

- Extremely worried or anxious
- Can't sleep
- No appetite
- Suicidal thoughts
- Difficulty going out in public
- Aggressive behavior (verbal or physical/both)

- Impulsive
- Often sad or very emotional
- Angry or very irritable
- Hear voices or see things
- Can't concentrate or focus
- Wanting to harm yourself or others
- Feel hopeless
- Don't want to see or be around family and friends
- Have big mood swings
- Sometimes depressed
- Other: _____

Below are questions that are recommended when meeting a potential new therapist. This will help determine if the therapist can provide adequate help for the problems you are facing.

QUESTIONS

1. What do you consider to be your specialty or area of expertise?
2. Do you have experience or problems dealing with (pick any that apply to you) age, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, etc. Please describe the experience or problems.

This question will pertain to your own background. If you want a treatment that uses a specific religion's teachings, you need to know if the therapist understands that. Additionally, if you need to discuss situations relating to gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or race issues, you want to make sure the therapist can adequately address it without judgement or preconceived notions.
3. What training/evidence-based treatment do you have for issues of health and wellness that may arise related to (pick any that apply to you) age, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, etc.?
4. What kind of resources/training do you have available to remain up to date with issues facing (pick any that apply to you) age, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, race, etc., so that I can avoid having to educate my provider as much as possible?
5. What therapy approach do you use? And how do you feel it could help me?
6. Would you provide sessions to me virtually, in person or both?
7. Do you feel that I am a good fit for you?

Now that you have had a chance to ask these questions, how do you decide whether the therapist is a good fit?

- Would you feel comfortable sharing more with this therapist?
- Did you feel respected and heard?
- Do you think this therapist is knowledgeable and can really help?
- Does this therapist use language that reflects an understanding of your background and identities?

What should you say if you don't want to move forward?

Be honest with yourself and the therapist. If you don't think they're the right fit, or you're not sure, you can say so with one of these simple phrases:

- "I'm considering a few options, but can I get back to you by phone or email?"
- "Thank you so much for your time. I'm grateful to have learned more about your practice and expertise. As it stands, I'm going to continue in my search for a therapist, but I'll contact you if anything changes."

Therapists are professionals. It's much better to be direct than to waste your time scheduling a session you aren't excited to attend. They also will not take your rejection personally – this happens all the time. It's best for both you and the therapist to feel a sense of connection before you begin your sessions together and if it isn't there, they might not be the best fit.

Just make sure to follow up and let them know your decision so they know you're in good hands!

Acknowledgements

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