

Choosing a Counselor

In choosing a counselor, always keep in mind that you are the *consumer*. You are purchasing a service from a professional and have choices about whether you want to begin such a relationship. The following list of questions are only suggestions and are not listed in any order. Feel free to use them in any way you choose.

Suggested questions to ask a potential counselor:

- What are your areas of training, experience, and specialization? Are there particular techniques you use?
- Will you discuss my treatment plan with me? What happens if we disagree about my goals?
- Are you licensed by or registered with the state?
- Have you ever had a charge of unethical conduct brought against you?
- For what length of time do you usually treat clients?
- Is there anyone with whom you will be discussing my case?
- Have you had experience with other people in similar situations?
- Do you charge for an initial consultation? Do you charge for a telephone consultation?
- How much do you charge for each counseling session? How long will our appointment be?
- If I decide that I would like to work with you, are there any other interviews that you require me to complete?

Many therapists gain clients through word of mouth, and certainly hearing good things about a therapist is a promising sign that the therapist that was good for your friend will also be good for you. But just as you won't necessarily like all your friend's friends, you won't necessarily "click" with your friend's choice of therapist either.

A good therapist for you is one that you feel comfortable with. You need to like and respect your therapist or you will not be open to what they say to you. You should also feel comfortable with your therapist, in that you feel that you could say anything to them and you would not feel that they would judge you or think less of you. This is very important, since there may be things that you tell a therapist that you will never tell another person. So it is very important to feel that you trust them and you trust their judgment.

After deciding on a therapist it is a good idea to give a therapist at least two sessions before you make up your mind whether you can work with them. If you still feel uncomfortable, it's time to find another. Also be prepared to feel nervous and uncomfortable at times with your therapist. After all, they are not meant to be a friend who will nod and agree with everything you say. Sometimes therapists can make you feel very uncomfortable indeed, as they slowly move you towards areas in your life that are blocking you and you don't want to deal with. This is where it is important that you have that initial liking and trusting relationship, because when things start to get hard in therapy, you need to feel reassured that your therapist is there trying to make your life better and is ultimately on your side.

Occasionally you will get angry with your therapist, and a good therapist will be able to cope with that and not get angry back at you. An angry therapist is not a good sign, and although rare lapses are acceptable, since we are all human, a therapist who routinely displays frustration at your slow progress or inability to move past a certain difficulty in your life, is not the right therapist for you.

The best relationship is where you are able to look back and see that during the difficult times in your life journey, your therapist was there, like a patient, listening, hoping for and watching your recovery. When you finally "get there" they are almost as pleased as you are!