

## Choosing a Therapist

by

Bradley T. Wajda, D.O.

Life is difficult. Hardships, losses, and disappointments are unavoidable. It's easy to get stuck in problems and not see a way out. That's when you realize that you need help from a professional. So how do you go about finding the right help? Of course wisdom, life experience, and empathy are vital qualities for a therapist if they are to help you to develop the skills you need to manage life. Here are some things to consider when searching for the right therapist for you:

### Professional Experience

Find a professional who has treated people with problems similar to yours. Often therapists focus on specific issues such as eating disorders, sexual dysfunction or mood disorders. Sometimes a therapist has a particular focus or works closely with particular populations such as children, same-sex couples or people of particular religious backgrounds. This leads to the next topic.

### Shared Values

It is critical that you choose a therapist that shares your same values. Ideally, psychotherapy would be value-free, therapists are human. Therapy is a much more than just problem-solving. You are building a relationship—a therapeutic relationship that is intended to be life-changing and life-enhancing. Your therapist needs to be someone who makes you feel understood and accepted. For example, if the regret over an abortion brings you in to therapy, then you certainly want to know how the therapist feels about the subject.

### Credentials

Ph.D., M.D., D.O., Psy.D., L.M.F.T, L.C.S.W.—these are credentials and degrees assuring therapists are trained and licensed.

### Have any complaints been filed with the licensing board?

You can check with the applicable licensing board in your state.

### Peer consultation

An important professional activity for any therapist is to seek consultation with colleagues. This allows for reviewing cases, receiving advice (especially when there is a failure to progress in treatment), and ensuring that they don't transfer their own issues into the treatment process.

### Characteristics of the therapist.

Psychotherapists are trained in a variety of approaches. Are you looking for a specific type of therapy such as individual, group or family? Many people wonder if they would do better with a female or a male therapist. The therapist's age and cultural background along with other characteristics also can affect the therapeutic relationship. Trust your instincts and choose who feels right for you.

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### **The financial side**

Finding the perfect therapist isn't helpful if you can't afford to pay for the treatment. When you are paying out-of-pocket then make sure you agree on the fee. If there is a flexible fee schedule adjusted to your needs or income? Is the therapist clear about policies such as the fee for a missed appointment and the method of payment?

There are several types of insurance—HMO, PPO, etc. Begin by checking with your insurance carrier about the mental health benefits available to you. Many plans limit the number of visits they will pay for. Are there out-of-network benefits? (meaning “can I see any therapist I choose”). Does your primary care physician have to make the referral for treatment to be covered?

Professional codes of ethics require that a therapist maintain boundaries involving both social and business relationships. This includes being prohibited from accepting professional or personal services from you or your family in exchange for psychotherapy services.