

## The Top 5 Questions to Ask When Seeking a Therapist

You've decided to seek professional assistance to help you deal with difficulties in your personal and/or professional life. If you've never done this before, choosing a mental health professional can be daunting. This process, in and of itself, can even become anxiety-provoking for some individuals. You may be asking "how do I go about this" and "who do I choose?" The following report contains questions that you may want to consider when selecting a therapist.

(For the purposes of this report, the terms "clinician," "psychotherapist," and "therapist" will be used interchangeably.)

- 1. What issues/problems do you want to address in therapy?** While most, if not all, mental health clinicians treat common mental health issues such as depression, anxiety, stress and anger management, there are therapists who specialize in various treatment techniques (e.g., couples counseling, family therapy, hypnotherapy, sex therapy, pastoral/Christian counseling), client populations (e.g., children/adolescents, senior adults, women, ethnic minorities), and issues/diagnoses (e.g., chemical addictions, bipolar disorders, personality disorders, divorce mediation). Asking the clinician questions regarding his/her specialization will be helpful to determine whether he/she can best meet your needs/concerns, particularly if you believe you need specialized services.
- 2. What are the therapist's credentials?** If you look at the Yellow Pages, websites, and therapist directories, you'll notice the vast differences in mental health professionals. These professionals include psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, marriage counselors, family therapists, mental health counselors, as well as other practitioners who may provide counseling or psychotherapy. "Psychotherapist," "counselor," or "therapist" are considered global terms that can encompass various types of clinicians. One difference is the educational level of the clinician. For example, a psychiatrist has a medical degree (M.D.), a psychologist has a doctorate degree (Ph.D., Psy.D., or Ed.D.), and social workers and counselors generally have Masters degrees. Another difference is the type of service(s) the clinician will provide. Although some psychologists now have prescription privileges, psychiatrists or nurse practitioners typically prescribe medication. Psychologists will provide therapy, but they are also able to conduct psychological evaluations. Knowing the therapist's credentials are also important if you plan to utilize your insurance plan to cover your treatment fees, as some insurance plans will NOT cover certain types of clinicians (see question #4). Also, clinicians who are "licensed" or "certified" have met the requirements set forth by state regulatory agencies.
- 3. How does the clinician work with clients?** Is the therapist more supportive or directive in working with clients? Does the clinician use a more "collaborative model" with clients? Does the clinician focus more on past issues or current

symptoms? Does the therapist utilize “homework” or “exercises” between therapy sessions? By asking some of these questions, you may get a better “feel” for how the therapist will work with you.

4. **What are the clinician’s fees?** How are billing of fees and payments handled? Does the therapist accept insurance plans? If so, which one(s)? Therapy involves a financial commitment. Fees are usually based on the educational level and experience of the clinician, as well as the type of services that are offered by the clinician. For some individuals, these fees can be offset by insurance coverage. If you decide to utilize your insurance benefits, note that there are usually certain restrictions that may apply including selecting certain therapists, limits on the number of sessions that will be covered (and sometimes how often the sessions are scheduled), restrictions on the type of services (e.g., insurance plans usually do NOT cover marital/couples therapy), and the type of issues/problems that can be addressed in therapy.
5. **Is there are “type” of therapist you would prefer working with?** Many people feel more comfortable working with a certain type of therapist (for whatever reason). This has more to do with your *preference*. Some characteristics clients have identified include the gender of the therapist (i.e., male or female), age of the clinician (i.e., older versus younger), and ethnic/racial/cultural background of the therapist.

Above all, you should feel comfortable with the therapist, as you will be addressing sensitive issues in therapy. Some therapists offer a free consultation session (usually over the phone for a few minutes) giving potential clients an opportunity to ask questions and “get to know” a therapist.

To find out how our services can meet your individual needs, contact us at [\(813\) 985-6121](tel:8139856121) or visit our website at [www.liveempowered.com](http://www.liveempowered.com) to schedule your FREE phone consultation.

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