

Choosing a Mental Health Therapist

How Counseling Can Help

Therapy can be an effective treatment for mental and emotional problems. Although it can be very helpful to talk about your problems with close friends and family members, sometimes we need expert guidance from trained professionals who are both knowledgeable and objective.

The following videos will demonstrate the advantages of seeking therapy:

[The Try Guys Try Therapy](#)

[People Talk About Their First Therapy Session](#)

You don't have to be diagnosed with a mental health problem to benefit from therapy. Many people in therapy seek help for everyday concerns: relationship problems, job stress, or self-doubt, for example. Others turn to therapy during difficult times, such as divorce or the death of a loved one.

What Type of Therapist Should You Choose?

If you are looking for someone to talk to, your options include professional counselors, clinical social workers, and psychologists. Psychologists can often do psychological testing in addition to counseling. Psychiatrists are medical doctors and are the only mental health providers able to write prescriptions for medicines like antidepressants. (Very few psychiatrists do counseling, so if you choose to try medications it is best to work with both a counselor and a psychiatrist.) If you are dealing with a specific issue such as an eating disorder, trauma, or substance abuse, you will want to find a therapist who specializes in that area.

Finding a therapist who is right for you

Having a therapist you can trust and who is respectful, compassionate, and nonjudgmental is essential to therapeutic process. If your connection with a therapist doesn't feel right—choose another one. DO NOT stay with a therapist who is critical, shaming, angry, inattentive, or has a value system that differs from your own. Cost can be an important factor when deciding whether to get counseling.

If you have health insurance, review your plan to find out:

- Which mental health services will they pay for? (individual counseling/family counseling/group sessions/testing and assessments)

- How many sessions will they pay for in a year?
- How much will you have to pay up front before your insurance will begin to pay (deductible)?
- How much do you have to pay each session (co-pay)?
- Are you limited to a certain list of providers, or can you see anyone?

Be sure that your counselor accepts your health insurance! For more information, see *Using Your Insurance to Find a Counselor* on NOVA's Counseling Referral System home page. Be advised that some therapists do not take health insurance. If you don't have health insurance, there are still ways for you to afford counseling. Many counselors offer lower fees based on income. This is referred to as "sliding scale". Reference *How to Seek Mental Health Care When You Do Not Have Insurance* on the Counseling Referral home page as well.

Don't Get Discouraged. You may need to call quite a few therapists before finding one who is taking new clients, and some may not have openings right away. Ask friends and family members if they have anyone they would recommend.

Questions to Ask a Therapist

Here are some questions that may be useful to ask when choosing a therapist:

- What can I expect from you, and what do you expect from me, in counseling?
- Do you have experience with my specific problems/issues?
- Do you understand my perspective as a _____? (This could be based on gender identity, culture, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.)
- How will I know if I am making progress? How will I know when I am "done"?
- Do you tend to focus on what is happening in the present or on what has happened in the past?
- What should I do if I am not feeling that therapy is helping me?
- Can you tell me about your fees and payment expectations and about your cancellation/no-show policy?