

7 QUESTIONS TO ASK WHEN FINDING A THERAPIST

By Steven Welch, LCSW, CASAC, CCTP

Finding a therapist can be an overwhelming task. You can use referrals from a friend/family, doctor and Google searches for example. However, the importance of doing your research before committing your time and money is crucial.

Here are 7 questions, in addition to many others, you can ask when looking for a therapist.

1. ARE YOU LICENCED IN MY STATE?

When a mental health professional is licensed, they have legally completed education and training recognized by your state. Their license number and other identifiers can be verified online. You will also find out whether they had any legal or ethical conduct issues.

2. WHAT TRAINING DO YOU HAVE?

The therapist will need to be trained in your area of concern. Ask about their type of trainings, certifications and academic background. Let's say they call themselves a cognitive behavioral therapist, for example, ask them to explain what that is in comparison to another style. Then do your own research about it.

3. DO YOU HAVE ANY, PRESENTATIONS, ARTICLES OR WORKSHOPS I CAN LOOK UP ONLINE?

To see or read about your therapist may give you insights on their approach and orientation about your particular issue. Their range of knowledge may also provide a sense of competency. They might recommend a book or article that focuses on your issue even if you decide not to meet with them.

4. WHAT IS YOUR CANCELLATION POLICY?

Therapists have different policies about cancelling appointments. Some may need to be contacted 48 or 24 hours before your scheduled session. Others may stipulate you are obligated to pay even if you can't make it. If possible, get all of their policies in writing before you start treatment. Insurance policies generally do not pay for missed sessions.

5. DO YOU ACCEPT MY INSURANCE IF NOT WHAT IS YOUR FEE?

Ask if the therapist accepts your insurance. Before you call, find out if the therapist is listed as a provider covered by your insurance. Sometimes the provider lists are not up-to-date. Fees range drastically. Ask if they have a sliding scale or can the fee be negotiated.

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6. HOW IS MY CONFIDENTIALITY / INFORMATION PROTECTED?

Ask how your information is stored, documented and who has access to it. For example, life insurance companies may have access to your medical records to determine if coverage can be offered and determine the price of your premium.

7. DO YOU OFFER A FREE CONSULTATION?

Ask if they offer a free consultation so you can ask your specific questions. Many will offer this on the phone. The consultation is usually time limited (i.e. 20 minutes). Also ask how long the sessions are. No matter how many questions you ask, ultimately, it's about feeling emotionally safe in a working relationship. The therapist must be a good "fit" for you.