

## HOW TO FIND OR CHOOSE A THERAPIST

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So, you've decided to talk with a Mental Health Professional. Maybe you are having relationship problems, or struggling to cope with work stress. Maybe you gave up therapy years ago because you didn't have the time to go, and have realized you would benefit from going back. Congratulations on choosing a healthy self-care strategy!

Choosing a therapist can be a bit daunting, but don't let that derail your efforts. Here are some tips that might help. First, understand how you will pay for the therapy. If you don't have medical insurance right now, that doesn't mean you cannot find a therapist. There are many community mental health agencies who take self-pay patients. Some of these charge people on a sliding scale depending on your income. <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/> is a link that can help you find agencies in your area.

If you have insurance, do you have a copay? Do you have a network you have to stay within? If you don't know the answers to these questions, call your insurance. Even if you find a therapist from a different source, still check with your insurance to make sure they will cover that service.

Your company might have an EAP, or an Employee Assistance Program. An EAP is a benefit some employers provide which allows the employee to confidentially call the EAP company for resources. One of the most common resources employees call about is therapy. Most EAPs will not only help you find a therapist, but they usually offer a small number of free sessions. Again, it's confidential, so you don't have to worry or fear if your employer finds out.

While your insurance company might have lists of therapists for you, it can be difficult to figure out who to call. You can see if you can get a referral from your primary care doctor. Find out why they refer to this particular therapist. Have they received positive feedback about that therapist from other patients? A great way to see more about therapists is by using the link <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us> and choose the "find a therapist" option. This website allows you to narrow down a list of therapists using many filters, such as location, gender, specialty, insurance accepted, and more. Each therapist listed includes a picture and a bio for that person. This is a great tool for starting a list of people to call. Try to gather a list of 5-10 options.

The next step is to call the therapists. You want to inquire about their availability - evening and/or weekend appointments - days/times that fit around your work schedule. While they might work for an agency that has an intake department or front desk which schedules appointments, see if you can speak with the therapist briefly before coming in. It's ok to ask the therapist a few questions before making an appointment. Ask how long they have been practicing. Find out what experience they have with the issues you are having. See what their ideas are about helping people and how they do so.

What you are really trying to do with this little "interview" is see if the therapist seems like a good fit. Remember that there are "bad" therapists, just like there are people in any job in any field who aren't great at what they do. Secondly, even the best therapist is not a good fit for everyone. Therapy is a relationship between two people, first and foremost. While different therapists practice different methods, all types of therapy are impossible without a trusting relationship. As a person, you meet people who just rub you the wrong way, make you uncomfortable, or who instill distrust in you. Listen to your feelings.

Sometimes you will realize that you and your therapist are not a good fit after several sessions. It's ok to start over with someone else. **Do not get discouraged if this happens.** The type of therapy the therapist practices might not be working well for you. It can be difficult to start over, but it's when you have a good therapist who is a good fit for you that breakthroughs happen.

Finally, it's important to understand that therapy can be difficult. Sometimes you will feel worse before you start to feel better. Try to stick it out. You might be trying to change behavior and thought patterns which have been in place for decades. It takes time, but you are worth it!