

CHOOSING THE RIGHT THERAPIST

Wisdom, empathy, compassion and character are all attributes you will want your therapist to have. In addition, you want a professional with good training and knowledge in his or her chosen field.

When you assess various therapists, here are some basic questions to help you sort through their credentials:

1. Are they licensed in the state of Florida? (This means they have completed a graduate or post-graduate degree with an accredited university, have had intensive academic study in the field of mental health, have completed supervised clinical experience and have passed the state licensure exam.)
2. What expertise do they have with my type of problem?
3. Can they accommodate my schedule?
4. Do they have a good reputation?
5. Do they accept my insurance or what do they charge if I pay cash?
6. Are they easily accessible either by car or public transportation?

Individuals often wonder if they would do better with a female or male therapist. Due to the nature of your concern, you can trust your instincts to determine if the gender of a therapist is a significant issue for you and then choose what feels right for you personally.

Once you feel confident that a therapist meets your criteria, you are ready for your first meeting. Pay attention to how you feel in the therapist's presence and in the therapeutic setting he or she created. Be aware how well the therapist listens and responds to you. Even though you are choosing to make yourself vulnerable to another human being, it can be anxiety provoking so pay attention to your comfort level as the session progresses. The foundation of good therapy is the relationship you and the therapist build together. It is essential that you find someone with whom you feel a comfortable connection, someone who makes you feel understood and accepted and someone who creates and maintains an environment within which you can safely explore even the most deeply felt sources of pain and conflict. You deserve the best possible therapeutic experience for a life-changing and life-enhancing experience.

As you go through the process of choosing the therapist who will best serve your needs, the identification of various "letters behind a name" may be a bit confusing. Below is a list of various designations you may see as you continue your search.

M.D. - Medical Doctor, A psychiatrist is a specialist in the mental health field.

PhD. - Doctor of Philosophy, often trained in psychological testing.

PsyD - Doctor of Psychology; often trained in assessment.

MSW- Master of Social Work; trained in biopsychosocial functioning of individuals, couples, families, groups, organizations and communities.

MA, MS - Master of Arts, Master of Science, often trained in types of counseling, such as rehabilitative counseling, and other various degrees in counseling.

EdD. EdS, - Masters in some form of education.

Above and beyond the graduate degrees, the state-licensed individuals may have the following titles along with their degree letters.

LCSW - Licensed Clinical Social Worker

LMHC- Licensed Mental Health Counselor

LMFT - Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

CAP - Certified Addictions Professional

In addition, you may see a variety of other letters you can inquire about with your therapist as these letters change and vary by state. Don't let all the "letters" confuse or overwhelm you when searching for your therapist.