

Ask Your Therapist

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I want to thank all the readers who gave me positive feedback about my first therapy column. One person asked me if I would be willing to write about the “basics” of finding a good therapist. Of course! Thanks for asking!

If you are fortunate to have health insurance call them to find out the names of the therapists in your health insurance network. Then sort through the list by specialty and geography and see who you get.

Other methods of finding a therapist are to look in the yellow pages, ask friends who may have seen a therapist, or ask your primary care physician for a referral.

As in most branches of health care, therapists often have areas of specialization. Before you pick up the phone think about what the issue is that you are wanting help with.

So you gather up your courage and make a call. Sometimes you will get the actual person, sometimes you will get a receptionist, and often you will get the voicemail (because they are talking with someone else and won't interrupt that conversation to answer the phone). Leave a simple message with your name, phone # and the best times to reach you. Say you are looking for a therapist, what health insurance you have and the name of the issue you want help with. For example, you would say “My name is John, my # is ____, the best time to reach me is between _ and _ in the evening, I have ____ health insurance and I'm looking for someone to help me with issues of depression and problems in my marriage.”

Call several people. Don't be discouraged if you don't get a call right back. When you do get called back, make sure you are speaking with the actual therapist, not the assistant. Tell them what you are needing help with and ask if they have experience dealing with this issue. Make sure they take your insurance if you have insurance. Find out if they have a waiting list or if you can be seen within a few days. If you are feeling strongly that you need to be seen very quickly, tell them that. Notice how you are feeling about the therapist over the phone. Are you getting good attention? Do you think you could speak openly with this person?

It is OK to make appointments with several therapists and to “shop around” for the one who is right for you. But let them know during the initial session. New clients generate a lot of paperwork and if you are not going to continue it can reduce the paperwork.

The first session is a mutual interview. You are interviewing the therapist to see if they are right for you and the therapist is interviewing you to see if they can help

you. You are hiring a consultant to assist you in your own healing. You hold the chequebook and you should get your money's worth. You have equal power in this relationship. If you are terribly uncomfortable with the therapist and you are certain it is the therapist and not the issues you are talking about, it is fine to say you are interviewing several therapists and you will call for another appointment if you want one. If you interview several therapists and you have the same reaction each time, it's probably you, not them, so bite the bullet, pick one and start dealing with your problems.

Next month - evaluating the therapist you chose, deciding to continue or discontinue, changing therapists, and when is it time to leave therapy?