

How to find a therapist who fits your needs

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Deciding to go into therapy is a big move, one that people sometimes struggle with for a variety of reasons.

But now that you've realized [therapy](#) would be helpful for you, how to find a [therapist](#)? It's important to know what outcome you're hoping for and what you feel you need help achieving.

It will take a little research to determine which professionals your insurance will cover and how you'll pay any [out-of-pocket costs](#), but asking the right questions can help you ensure you have a qualified therapist who's also the right fit for you.

Know your options

While numerous types of therapy exist, perhaps the best known is [cognitive behavioral therapy](#) (CBT), which is used to treat a number of [mental health issues](#), from anxiety to eating disorders.

It focuses on uncovering unhealthy patterns of thought and exploring how a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviors affect each other, according to the [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) (NAMI).

"Cognitive behavioral therapy is going to be an approach to treatment that looks at or tries to understand current functioning problems and address what's maintaining those and how might a person's current behaviors and cognitions be contributing to those challenges," said [Lynn Bufka](#), a [clinical psychologist](#) in Maryland and the American Psychological Association's associate chief for practice transformation.

Another type is relational psychotherapy, often focused on couple or [family relationships](#).

Working through the red tape

Cost was one of the top reasons that people who felt they needed therapy

didn't pursue it, according to the [American Psychological Association](#), which cited data from the U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

This may be resolved by checking to see if your health [insurance company](#) offers coverage for mental health therapy and if certain practitioners are "in network."

Ask a potential therapist about their fees and whether they'll bill your insurance or provide you an invoice that you can submit to your insurance company.

Finding a therapist

Sometimes word-of-mouth recommendations are the best bet.

You can find a provider by asking your insurance company for a list or asking a doctor you're seeing to refer you to someone. You may also ask clergy, a friend or a family member for a recommendation.

The American Psychological Association can help you [find a psychologist by ZIP code](#), or you can look through the [National Register](#).

The American Psychiatric Association also offers a [locator](#) to help find a psychiatrist.

"I will say it can be a lot of work," Bufka noted. "And that's really unfortunate, particularly because when we're looking for a therapist we're typically looking for a therapist when we're not feeling great."

She suggests that if you have a family member or close friend who might be willing to help, ask them to make some of the necessary research calls.

Other important questions to ask

Some mental health issues are quite common, such as anxiety and depression, but other conditions may require asking more questions when seeking the right therapist for you.

"I think it's really important to ask, 'Do you have experience treating this? Here's what I think's going on with me,'" Bufka said.

Treatment for bipolar disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder can be more specialized. And someone who has a history of trauma may want to find a provider who has worked with others who have experienced similar issues.

"If something that's really important to you is your spirituality or your [sexual orientation](#) or your relationship with X, Y or Z, and you know that's going to be part of your treatment, ask 'How comfortable are you with this?'" Bufka suggested.

You can also ask, "How long do you think it might be before I start to see some change?" and "About how long do you think I might be in therapy overall?" she added.

Online vs. local

Fortunately, [mental health care](#) delivered via the internet appears to be just as helpful for many mental health conditions as that delivered in person, Bufka said.

A gray area is whether a patient can get the same qualified counseling services and security through one of the new all-virtual platforms as they can with a local provider online or in person.

"If you go to some of these larger platforms where there might be hundreds or thousands of therapists, it can be a little bit harder to verify the credentials of who you're seeing and what their expertise is," Bufka cautioned. "So just do a little more due diligence around that."

Verify that the therapist you'll be seeing is licensed, Bufka advised. That protects you by ensuring your therapist has met a minimum standard of education, training and other licensing requirements. Ask what happens to your data if the clinician you're seeing leaves the practice.

If you do find a therapist and later discover that person isn't a good fit for you, it's OK to make a change.

"You should feel comfortable saying, 'I don't think this is working for me. I need to find somebody else,'" Bufka said. "Many therapists can help you find someone else. They may be thinking that, too."

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