

Selecting a Mental Health Professional

More Americans than ever are seeking help from mental health professionals. Choosing a provider is a very important decision, and several factors – such as the provider’s credentials, competence, and your comfort level with him or her – are worth considering.

Types of Mental Health Providers

Psychiatrists

Have medical degrees, can prescribe medication, and have completed three years of residency training beyond medical school in mental health care.

Psychologists

Have a doctorate in psychology.

Professional Counselors

Have a minimum of a master’s degree in a mental health discipline, and at least two years of post-graduate supervised experience.

Marriage and Family Therapists

Typically have a master’s degree or doctorate in marriage and family therapy, and at least one year of supervised practice.

Social Workers

Have a minimum of a master’s degree in social work and at least two years of post-graduate supervised experience.

Research

Finding the best mental health professional requires a bit of

work. If you are depressed or have another serious mental illness, it can be difficult to do on your own. In that case, ask family, friends, or your primary physician for assistance.

The best ways to locate a provider are:

- Through referrals by friends, family, and associates
- In the phone book – try looking under Community Services, Counselors, or Social Service Organizations
- Asking your health insurance company for a list
- Asking your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) at work for a referral

Also take into account factors that may be important to you, such as age, race, gender, religion, language, and cultural background. It is not wrong to rule out certain providers because of these criteria; you will be establishing a long-term relationship with this person, and you need to feel as comfortable as possible.

Questions to Ask a Prospective Mental Health Provider

- What types of treatment do you provide?

- Are you licensed?
- What is your training or experience with my problem area?
- How will you work with my family or me?
- How will we decide on treatment goals?
- How often will we meet?
- How will we measure my progress?
- What do you expect from me?
- What are your office hours?
- How do you handle emergency situations?
- Do you charge for missed appointments?
- What is your hourly fee?
- Do you have any policies I should be aware of?
- Are you in my health plan’s provider network?

For more information, go to www.mayoclinic.com and visit the Mental Health section.



Stop and Evaluate...

Once you have made your selection about which mental health professional to see, make sure the match is working. If you don't feel comfortable at your first session, talk about your concerns at your next session. Or, consider changing therapists. Never feel compelled to stay with anyone you don't feel comfortable with.

Source: Mayo Clinic