8 Questions You Should Ask Any Therapist You are Considering

Psychotherapy is a partnership between a person and a therapist that is designed to help a person overcome his/her/their difficulties. It offers a supportive environment where feelings and worries can be shared in an honest and confidential way.

Professional therapists are highly trained in the assessment and treatment of mental health concerns, addressing problematic behavior patterns (e.g., smoking, relationship difficulties, excessive worry), and the use of behavior change strategies.

Professional therapists follow a strong code of ethical standards and abide by the state's laws that regulate their profession; however, picking the right therapist can be tricky. There are people who label themselves as "therapists" who may not have the appropriate training and credentials to best help others.

To help you find the right therapist and to protect you from potential harm, here are 8 questions you should ask any therapist you are considering:

1. Are you a licensed psychologist (PsyD, PhD), social worker (LCSW) , professional counselor (LPC, LMFT) in this state? Is your license active and in good standing?

2. Where did you get your degree? What type of training or clinical experiences have you had in treating the kinds of problems I am having (mood problems, anxiety, sleep difficulties, etc.)?

3. How many years have you been seeing clients?

4. What is/are your areas of expertise?

5. I am here because (I am feeling stressed, I feel sad, I lost a person close to me, I feel disoriented), and I'm having trouble (at work, at home, in social situations, sleeping). What has been your experience treating this kind of problem?

6. What type of treatments do you use? How effective are they in dealing with situations similar to mine? How do you know if treatment is working, and what do you do when it doesn't work?

7. How much do you charge? Do you accept my insurance? Do you have availability in the (mornings, afternoons, evenings, weekends)? When's the earliest date that I can see you for our first appointment?

8. Does your work in therapy tend to be more focused on the past or the present? Do you tend to see people for long-term therapy or for shorter-term therapy?

Here are some questions you can ask yourself after you've seen a therapist:

What things did I like or not like about the session?
How comfortable and safe did I feel talking with this person?
Were all my initial questions and concerns adequately addressed?
Do I think the therapist will be able to help me?
Do I want to see this therapist again?

It is important to trust your intuition with regards to the process; sometimes a good rapport and trust in the therapist is equally as important as the modality that the counselor uses to work with a client. (i.e. whether they use CBT, DBT, mindfulness or any other modality).

Here is an excerpt from the American Psychological Association (http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/choose-therapist.aspx) that I think is worth pondering when meeting a new therapist:

"It is a good sign if you begin to feel a sense of relief, and a sense of hope. People often feel a wide variety of emotions during therapy. Some qualms about therapy that people may have result from their having difficulty discussing painful and troubling experiences. When you begin to feel relief or hope, it can be a positive sign indicating that you are starting to explore your thoughts and behavior."