



SAN DIEGO HOSPICE
and The Institute for Palliative Medicine

Finding A Therapist

These questions are general questions that can be answered either by your future therapist, or his or her receptionist.

- 1) *Do you have a free initial consultation? How long is this appointment?*
- 2) *Have you had experience helping clients who have had a child die?*
- 3) *What sort of insurance plans do you accept?*
- 4) *What are your fees? Do you have a sliding fee schedule?*
- 5) *How long are your normal sessions?*
- 6) *Are you licensed or certified with a board? In California those who you might see can be a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT), a licensed Psychologist or a medical doctor practicing Psychiatry.*
- 7) *What are your normal hours of operation? Do you make exceptions to these hours?*
- 8) *What is your location?*

If you talked directly to the therapist in this initial phone call, ask yourself:

- 1) *Did he/she seem approachable on the phone?*
- 2) *Did he/she seem defensive or open in the discussion of fees?*
- 3) *Did she seem interested?*
- 4) *Can you live with the commute to and from her office? Is it accessible to you, if you are dependent on public transportation?*

Questions you might ask during your first session:

Questions to ask yourself after the first session:

- 1) *Is there plenty of parking in a well-lit area? Is there a bus stop near by?*
- 2) *Is there a washroom easily accessible?*
- 3) *Is the decor in the waiting room comfortable? Is there anything in the waiting room that makes you feel overtly uncomfortable?*
- 4) *Is the receptionist (if there is one), approachable and politely friendly?*
- 5) *Is there music in the waiting room, and if so, is it soothing, or is it annoying?*
- 6) *In the therapists office are there plenty of choices where you can sit?*
- 7) *Do you find anything uncomfortable in the wall furnishings, color scheme, paintings or knickknacks? You will be staring at those walls for a while, so having pleasant surroundings can help.*
- 8) *Do you find the seating arrangement to be too close together, too far apart, or just right? Do you feel that it would be ok if you moved a seat to be more comfortable?*
- 9) *Is the office relatively friendly and comfortable?*

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10) *If you like to sit on the floor, are there cushions on the floor?*

Questions to Ask your Therapist

These questions might take a couple of sessions to ask, and that is perfectly ok. It is important that you feel comfortable. The following are not in any particular order.

Fees

Does she plan on raising her fees in the near future?

How does she handle insurance claims? Do you have to pay upfront or does she handle the insurance for you?

Are you charged for a full session if you miss an appointment? How much notice is needed for cancelled appointments? (Listen to her response, as most therapists do have the policy if you miss, you pay, but if you listen to this or her words and the way it is said, you can see how compassionate he or she is.

Availability

- 1) *If you were in a crisis, would she be available for emergency sessions?*
- 2) *Is there an after hours number that you can use?*
- 3) *Can you call her during the week if necessary?*
- 4) *If you have any special requests of how she should contact you, i.e., using a pager, or whatever, is he or she flexible?*
- 5) *Will he or she accept faxes or emails of issues you want to bring up in the next session?*

Confidentiality

- 1) *What is kept confidential and is there ever a time she would feel it was right to breach that confidentiality?*
- 2) *Does she make it a firm policy to make you sign a waiver before she releases any information, no matter how seemingly mundane, about you to anyone?*

Philosophy of Therapy

- 1) *What is the therapists philosophy of therapy and the healing process?*
- 2) *How does the therapist define/view progress?*
- 3) *How long does he or she think a person with your issues would need to see her?*
- 4) *How will you know that it is time to stop seeing the therapist?*



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5) *Who do they believe is driver of the bus (them or you)? That is, does the therapist believe in client directed or therapist directed therapeutic process?*

- * Did she seem friendly, approachable?
- * Did she try to make you feel at ease?
- * Where did she sit? Were you comfortable with that, or could you become comfortable with that?
- * How do you feel she received your questions? Did she seem defensive, bored or resigned?
- * What was her body language like? Did you feel she could be an ally in your healing?
- * Did she seem overtly distant or disconnected with you?
- * Was she too friendly? Too chummy?
- * Did she come across as "know it all", or did she come across as someone who genuinely wants to help you discover your own healing journey.
- * Do you "like" her? Do you feel like you "click", like she understands your language?
- * Do you feel you will be able to trust her, in time, with the deep personal issues that you need to discuss? Does your gut say you can trust her in time? A sense of anxiety or discomfort is common when starting any new relationship. Meeting with someone else to talk about painful issues will not be easy.
- * Did you come away with a sense of hope that she can help you?
- * Only you can decide if any sense of discomfort is because of the challenge of therapy or because you are sensing that this particular therapist is not appropriate for you.

Don't be afraid to shop around. It is not uncommon to interview several therapists before you find the one that "fits" you and your issues. Don't be discouraged. Phoning several therapists, for the initial consultation could be a good plan as it will give you an idea of what is out there as far as therapists in your area. However, don't become a professional shopper, that is, spending all your time interviewing therapists, and not spending time beginning your healing journey.



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After a few sessions, Ask yourself, "Is this process working for me?" You can't tell it's working just by asking "Is the pain going away?" because you may experience the process itself as painful - after all you may be looking at stuff you've been avoiding for a long time. So, it's not very helpful to ask: "Do I feel better?" It is, however, fair to ask "Does the pain feel more organized, more structured?" or "Do I have 'handles' on the problems that I didn't have before" or "Do I feel less stuck?" You can talk with your therapist about these questions. You can talk to friends about these questions. You can get second opinions. You are responsible for your recovery - so be a wise consumer, make sure you get the help you need.

Qualities of a Good Therapist

A good therapist will convey warmth, genuineness and respectful interest for you and your concerns. In addition, you can expect them to be empathetic, dynamic and alive, and be able to give you specific feedback. A good therapist should also convey mutual trust and not be afraid to confront or challenge you and your beliefs at times. Above all, a therapist should leave you with feeling of comfort and confidence in their therapeutic skills and abilities; ideally causing you to feel uplifted and hopeful about your future.