

## Choose Your Therapist Carefully

When you decide it's time to work with a mental health therapist, you are also committing yourself to a major investment in time and money. For this reason it's important to make sure you pick wisely. Looking in the phone book yellow pages might give you a lot of names and sometimes even their areas of expertise, but it really won't tell you if you and the therapist are a good match. There are several things to look for –

First, find a therapist you feel comfortable with. Get referrals from professionals you respect or friends who have been in therapy. Your therapist is not your friend but is your guide through a sometimes uncomfortable process of making changes in your life. Feeling trust in and respect by your therapist helps establish the bonds that can help this healing process.

Second, your therapist should have experience in the areas you are wanting to work in. It's fair to ask how long a therapist has been in practice, what areas they consider themselves to be especially good with, how recently they worked with someone with a problem similar to yours. You can even ask "how would you approach this situation; what can I expect you will do."

Third, look at the therapist's qualifications and pick from what you can afford. A therapist who is licensed in the state they practice in is required to meet certain educational, ethical and professional standards. Find out what your insurance will cover – what type of licensure, how many visits over what period of time, copayment, and so forth.

These three aspects will help you begin your search for your therapist. It really comes down to what your budget can afford and whom you feel comfortable with. This 'therapeutic bond' is a helpful part of the therapeutic process and some research indicates it may be one of the most healing properties in therapy. Whomever you choose, remember you are the consumer and have the right to ask for what you want. If you and the therapist turn out to not be a good match, you now have the skills to find someone who will work more effectively with you.