

Let's

talk!



Therapy can help you through life's tough spots, but it can also help you calm constant worry, communicate more constructively with your partner, or simply feel and function better. How to zero in on a therapist who can give you the tools.

1

DO YOUR LEGWORK

As with finding a job or a house, it's worth putting in the time to find the right therapist for you. Ask your doctor, friends, and clergyperson if they can recommend anyone. If you're researching people covered by your insurance, check their areas of expertise and training, which should be listed. The American Psychological Association (apa.org) and the National Alliance on Mental Illness (nami.org) list vetted professionals.

2

FIGURE OUT WHAT'S COVERED BY INSURANCE



■ **READ YOUR HEALTH INSURANCE PLAN.**

Many cover therapy. By law, your co-pay for mental health benefits can't cost more than the range of what you pay for medical/surgical benefits. Some plans cover a certain number of sessions, so be sure to ask your provider how much they'll cover once you've met that limit.

■ **CHECK IF YOUR COMPANY HAS AN EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.**

It's free short-term counseling with a licensed therapist. Typically, you get five to eight sessions. (It's confidential; your employer won't know you used the program.)

DECODE THE DEGREES

Therapists can have many letters after their names. Here's what they mean.

PSYCHIATRISTS are medical doctors (M.D.) who undergo four years of graduate training after medical school.

PSYCHOLOGISTS can have a Ph.D. with five to seven years of training; a Psy.D. with four to six years; or an Ed.D. with three to five years, in addition to a master's degree, usually in counseling.

PROFESSIONAL COUNSELORS, MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPISTS (L.M.F.T.), AND SOCIAL WORKERS (L.C.S.W.)

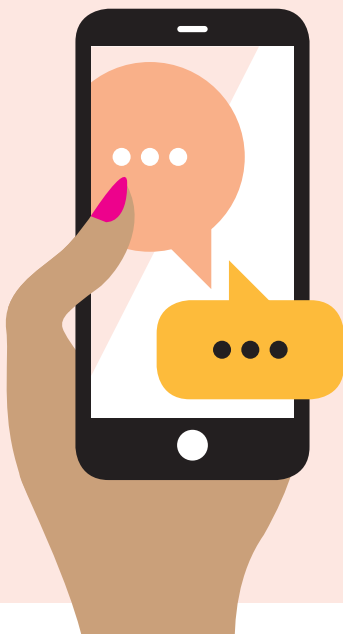
typically have a master's degree in psychology, counseling, social work, or related field.

WHAT ABOUT ONLINE THERAPY?

Emailing, texting, videoconferencing, or a phone call can be done on its own or in conjunction with in-office therapy. More research supports video- and teleconferencing, says Lynn Bufka, Ph.D., associate executive director for practice research and policy at the American Psychological Association. No matter what the mode, be sure the therapist is licensed and vetted.

HOW HELPFUL ARE ONLINE REVIEWS?

For restaurants, they're great. For therapists, not so much. It's unlikely that enough people have done a review to give a full picture of the therapist. And one person's "warm" manner is another's "cold and uninviting." Don't forgo chatting with therapists before signing on.



3

ASK AWAY

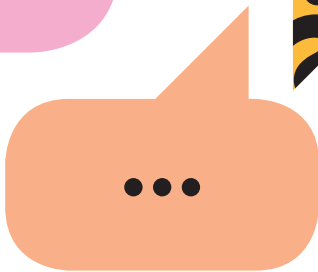
A chat with a potential therapist—in person or via phone—cues you in to how you'd mesh. Asking questions like these helps guide your conversation.

■ I'M CONCERNED ABOUT _____. HOW WOULD YOU HELP ME WORK ON THAT?

Therapists use many different methods to help you work through issues. For example, cognitive behavioral therapy helps you change your thinking about a situation or relationship; psychoanalysis uncovers coping strategies you use to deal with your past. You want to be on board with the method she chooses.

■ WHAT EXPERIENCE DO YOU HAVE TREATING THIS ISSUE?

Not all therapists treat all issues equally well, says David Susman, Ph.D., clinical psychologist and an assistant professor in the psychology department at the University of Kentucky. Look for someone with a history of dealing with your type of concerns.



■ HOW DO YOU KNOW THE TREATMENT IS WORKING?

And what do you do if you don't think I'm getting better? These create benchmarks for progress.

■ DO YOU THINK YOU CAN HELP ME?

You both need to feel like you can collaborate. A good therapist will refer you to another one if she doesn't think she can help you.

4

CHECK YOUR GUT

After speaking to the therapist, think about how you feel. "Don't expect that you're going to want to immediately tell her everything," says Kyong Yi, L.C.S.W., director of clinical operations at Portland Psychotherapy Clinic. "See if you can imagine sitting and talking to her." If you don't click after three visits, talk to the therapist about it, and know it's OK to see someone else.

IT'S A MYTH

Don't let these misconceptions get in the way of your improved mental health.

MYTH GOING TO THERAPY MEANS YOU ARE WEAK OR UNSTABLE.

"It takes strength and courage to admit you need help," says David Susman, Ph.D. "Would you consider yourself weak for seeking treatment for cancer or heart disease?"

MYTH YOU'LL BE IN THERAPY FOREVER.

The goal of therapy is to help you develop skills, insights, and perspective so you can take what you've learned and apply it on your own.

MYTH A FRIEND CAN DO THE SAME THING.

There are limits: Asking for insight on the same topic over and over again can stress a friendship, says Kyong Yi, L.C.S.W. ■