

Let's talk: How to find therapy that's right for you

By Julia Haskins

We all get down sometimes. Maybe work has been stressing you out or you've been having relationship issues. A brief case of the blues is no cause for concern, but if you can't shake the sadness or frustration that's been weighing you down for a while, you may want to try therapy.

Therapy can be a great resource if you're dealing with a mental health issue, recovering from trauma or just need an empathetic ear. No matter your reason for seeking therapy, a good therapist can help you get to the heart of your problems you're dealing with and help you take on challenges with confidence.

There are many different types of therapy, so it's important to do your research. If you want to explore the behaviors that affect your quality of life, behavioral therapy may be a good choice. If you would rather take a deep dive into your thinking patterns, cognitive therapy could be best. You can even combine both of these approaches with cognitive behavioral therapy.

Think about what you want out of your therapy experience and what you hope to accomplish through therapy. Choosing the right kind of therapy requires an honest evaluation of your personality and needs, says Theresa Nguyen, LCSW, vice president of policy and programs at Mental Health America.

"Sometimes getting down to specific types of therapy takes time to explore and you have to really know yourself," she says.

Are you the type of person who prefers structured conversation, or would you be more comfortable in a casual setting? Do you want to talk about the way that your brain works or ways to discuss solutions for getting through a tough time? You may also want to speak with a therapist who has expertise in an area such as trauma, grief or addiction, depending on your needs. You could even be more comfortable talking in a group setting.



A good way to begin your search for a therapist is to look online for a licensed professional in your area who will accept your insurance. Some community health centers or clinics may also offer free treatment for people who don't have insurance. From there, you can plug in more specific criteria about what kind of care you want to receive. Also make sure to note the professional background and credentials of any potential therapist as well as reviews from other patients found on credible websites. Narrow your list down to a handful of people to contact before setting up an appointment.

When you meet with your therapist for the first time, be clear about why you're seeking care and what you hope to get out of therapy. Tell your therapist any information that you believe would be relevant to your therapy experience and don't be shy about asking what you can expect.

It can be difficult to open up to someone you don't know well, so try meeting with a new therapist for several sessions before you decide whether to continue with a therapist, Nguyen says. Building a trusting relationship takes time. You may not feel better instantly, especially if you're talking about problems that aren't easy to speak about candidly. That said,



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don't feel pressured to stick with a therapist you don't work well with either, Nguyen says. The first person you meet isn't always the best fit, but that just means you're getting closer to identifying what you need out of therapy.

As you continue meeting with your therapist, pay attention to how you feel compared with when you began therapy. Nguyen says the most important question to ask yourself is "Do I feel better?" There are other emotions to consider as well, she notes. Do you feel safer? Calmer? Less stressed? Do you feel more empowered? Those are all signs that therapy is going well for you.

Therapy is a process, so try not to get discouraged. It may take a few appointments with different therapists before you find the right one and you may need a few sessions before you feel comfortable talking to a stranger about personal issues. The more you work at it, the better you'll understand how to navigate therapy.

Can't meet in person? No problem

There are plenty of ways to talk to a therapist that don't require an in-person visit. Many therapists are available to speak over the phone, via video chat or even texting. Sometimes therapists will also let their patients do a combination of teletherapy and in-person care.

Teletherapy can be a good option for people who have busy schedules or cannot easily meet with someone in person, but be sure to go over the pros and cons with your therapist. It's good to have options, but your health and wellness should always come before convenience.