

How do I choose a therapist?

A good place to start is asking your child's healthcare provider for a referral. Most pediatricians know mental health specialists who work with children. You might also talk with people you know and ask if they can tell you about a good therapist.

You may need to meet with a few therapists before you find the one who works best for your child. Most therapists welcome the chance to meet for one session to answer your questions. Some charge a fee for this meeting so be sure to ask if there is a charge for the session when you set the appointment.

What questions should I ask?

To help you decide on the right therapist for your child, you may want to ask the following questions:

- Is the therapist recommended by a person or professional organization you respect?
- What education (bachelor's, master's, or doctorate degree) does the therapist have?
- What training (areas of expertise) does the therapist have?
- What experience (number of years doing therapy, in what settings, with what kind of clients) does the therapist have?
- Is the therapist licensed? People with no training at all can call themselves psychotherapists or therapists. Licensed psychologists, psychiatrists, and certified social workers have met state and national requirements.
- What experience does the therapist have with your child's particular problems, struggles, or diagnosis?
- What percentage of his or her clients have gotten better?
- What percentage got worse?
- Ask about the fees and fee schedule:
- Do you pay after each session, monthly, or when billed?
- Do you pay for missed sessions?
- Are you charged for phone calls?
- Is there a sliding fee scale?
- Is the therapist on your health insurance plan?
- What types of personal information will be provided to your insurance company? Your child's personal history? Drug and alcohol history? Past diagnoses and medicines taken? Current problems and diagnoses? How will the therapist send confidential information to your insurance company? Fax machine? Computer? Telephone?
- Will the therapist work out a payment plan with you if you decide you don't want to file with your insurance company?
- What kind of information about the child will the therapist share with you? As a parent, you may expect that the therapist will tell you if your child is using illegal substances or is sexually active. The therapist may not expect to share this information with you. Ask about this at the first session.
- Under what circumstances would the therapist share confidential information with others such as police, healthcare providers, or employers?
- What kind of therapy does the therapist recommend for your child?
- Does the therapist mainly focus on your child's thoughts, feelings, or behaviors?
- Will the therapist focus on your child as an individual or will therapy include other family members?
- How long are the sessions? (30 minutes? 50 minutes?)
- Is the therapist available to see your child after or before school?
- About how many sessions will therapy take?
- What goals and results does the therapist suggest for your child? Are you satisfied with these?
- How do you reach the therapist in case of an emergency?
- Can the therapist prescribe medicine or refer to someone who can prescribe medicine?

You and your child must be comfortable with the therapist and trust him or her. If, after a few sessions, you don't feel comfortable, talk with the therapist about your feelings and consider finding a new therapist.

Children benefit most from therapy if they develop a trusting relationship with their therapist. The relationship that you and your child have with the therapist is the most important factor to consider in your decision.