

SHRINK SEARCH: FINDING THE RIGHT THERAPIST

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*"I've left a million messages and no one is calling back."
"I chose the first one who called back but I don't feel they really get me."*

Sound familiar? Finding a therapist can be frustrating at times. In large cities you may be overwhelmed by the number of therapists and not know where to start. You may find yourself avoiding the process which may include leaving messages or emailing therapists the same couple of lines about what you are going through. Don't lose hope! The right therapist is out there and these tips will help you find them.

Starting the Shrink Search

Start by using community resources to find a therapist who can meet your needs. Ask friends, a spiritual leader, or a health care provider if they can refer you to a psychotherapist. Make your decision based on recommendations from people whom you trust. Any therapist can take out a big ad in the yellow pages or on google. What really counts is if you notice the same therapist's name coming up when you ask around. Be especially careful when you read opinions about therapists online, like on Yelp.com. You have no way of knowing if that person's report about a therapist is accurate and therapists cannot respond to negative reviews without having compromised client confidentiality.

Wanting help with parenting your little one? Check out your local parenting resource websites like the Berkeley Parent's Network (parents.berkeley.edu) in Northern California for therapist recommendations. If you identify as a LGBT, you may go to a specific web site, like Gaylesta.org, to find a therapist who understands your community. Heard good things about EMDR, Hypnosis, Hakomi or EFT for couple issues? Visit websites that focus on those types of therapy techniques to find trained therapists rather than a more general site like psychologytoday.com. Psychologytoday.com can be a great place too if you use their filters to sort your options.

3, 2, 1...Contact

Trust your instincts. Pay attention to how you feel while you listen to a therapist's outgoing voice message or read their website. How does their voice make you feel? What kind of feeling did you get from your initial phone conversation? Use that information to figure out if you want to schedule a first appointment.

Take notes! If you are going through a list of therapists make sure to note the date you called and info you gather when they call back. If you are using a list from your insurance company, note whom you spoke to and whether they had room for new clients. Often insurance companies ask you the result of your calls and they can help you find you other therapists if everyone is full. They may also

approve you to see someone outside of your insurance network if you could not find a therapist who has experience with your issues or in-network.

When you leave a message be sure to let the therapist know if you want to use a particular type of insurance or are looking for a specific day or time for therapy. You will cut down on the phone tag if they can respond to a few of your important questions the next time they call. If a therapist doesn't call you back, don't assume anything. A therapist not responding could have been the result of a technology mishap like poor cell reception. Call again and clearly repeat your number twice. Calling again also shows them you are motivated to seek help.

Shop Around

Think of the types of people you felt most connected to in the past. For instance if you want to see someone of your own background, don't be afraid to ask a therapist for more information. You can also ask them about what kind of experience or training they have had working with people who share your issues. Depending on the therapist's training and personal style, they may not answer questions that they feel are personal. Other therapists might feel it is important to explore why the question is important to you, before disclosing information to you. Some may feel comfortable telling you right away.

Don't be afraid to schedule more than one first time appointment to "shop around" for your therapist. It's okay to let therapists know that you only want to meet with them once, to see if it feels like a good match. Therapists understand that finding someone you can connect with is the key to therapy that works.

Patience with the Process Pays Off

This journey you have embarked upon will take time so don't wait until you feel you or your relationship have reached a crisis state. Sometimes finding the right therapist for you may take weeks or over a month. Keep at it and don't get discouraged. Keep in mind that good connection to a therapist may be a mix of many things: humor, your ability to trust, their training, professional experience, location and availability. Take your time to find the right one as a good therapist can be available to help you over the course of your lifetime. Good luck on your shrink search and feel free to call if you need help finding a local therapist.



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