



Selecting a Mental Health Professional

by Dr Jeannie Higgins (2023)

There are several criteria to consider in selecting an appropriate mental health professional to work with you to address experiences, behaviours, feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations that may increase your vulnerability to and perpetuate your psychological distress.

The following points are especially relevant in selecting a worker:

- ✚ Trust your judgment about whether you feel safe, and listen to and assess if the person has some understanding of the difficulties you are describing.
- ✚ Remember that you are a consumer of psychological services and deserve the best treatment. It is appropriate to “shop around” until you find the right person for you.
- ✚ Ask about professional qualifications in psychology, psychiatry, social work or counselling and the person’s ongoing professional training in treating people who have experienced similar problems to your own.
- ✚ The therapist needs to explain and teach you some helpful strategies to secure your physical and psychological safety and cope with behaviours, thoughts, bodily sensations and feelings that contribute to the onset and maintenance of your psychological distress.
- ✚ Ensure that the therapist is “together”. It is crucial not to make yourself vulnerable to someone likely to abuse power in any way.
- ✚ It is not appropriate for therapists to have friendships or sexual relationships with their clients.
- ✚ Working with someone who will help you get in touch with your feelings is vital. They need to be emotionally supportive and warm without trying to rescue you or intrude.
- ✚ Look for someone who can help you recognise your strengths and to nurture and encourage those strengths, rather than solely concentrating on your problems.

Ask about:

- ✚ Confidentiality?
- ✚ Length of treatment?
- ✚ Ways of reviewing progress?
- ✚ How many clients with similar problems has this person treated?
- ✚ Payment of fees?
- ✚ Professional supervision for the therapist?

- + How do they take care of their own needs?
- + Availability outside business hours?
- + Handling emergencies, plans to travel or be absent for periods?
- + How the worker manages the termination of therapy?
- + How many problems in the relationship might be addressed?
- + Whether the person follows particular schools of treatment? What may this mean for their work with you?
- + The availability of references from ex-clients or colleagues?

You will know you are making progress if the following areas of your life are improving:

- + You can keep yourself safe
- + You are calmer more often
- + Your self-esteem is improving, and you like yourself
- + Your thinking is clearer, and you can make sound decisions
- + Your relationships are reciprocal and healthier
- + You can identify and express your feelings in constructive ways
- + Relief from any physical symptoms, e.g. headaches, skin disorders & gastrointestinal problems
- + Increasing control over your life
- + You have a greater awareness of yourself and your environment,
- + You are planning and creating a positive future,
- + You are more likely to maintain a positive and protective sense of yourself around others.

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