

Selecting a Mental Health Professional

Dr Jeannie Higgins (2017)

There are a number of criteria to consider in selecting an appropriate mental health professional to work with you in addressing experiences, behaviours, feelings, thoughts and bodily sensations which may increase your vulnerability to and perpetuate your psychological distress.

The following points are especially relevant in selecting a worker:

- ✦ Trust your own judgment about whether you feel safe, listened to and assess if the person seems to have some understanding of the difficulties you are describing
- ✦ Remember that you are a consumer of psychological services and you deserve the very best of 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 be able to explain and teach you some helpful strategies to secure your physical and psychological safety and to cope with behaviours, thoughts, bodily sensations and feelings that contribute to the onset and the maintenance of your psychological distress
- ✦ Ensure that the therapist is “together”. It is very important not to make yourself vulnerable with someone who is likely to abuse power in any way.
- ✦ It is not appropriate for therapists to have friendships or sexual relationships with their clients
- ✦ It is important to work with someone who will help you get in touch with your feelings. They need to be emotionally supportive and warm without trying to rescue you or intrude in any way
- ✦ Look for someone who is able to 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 this has person treated?
- ✦ Payment of fees?
- ✦ Professional supervision for the therapist?
- ✦ How they take care of their own needs?
- ✦ Availability outside business hours?
- ✦ Handling emergencies, plans to travel or be absent for periods?
- ✦ How the worker handles termination of therapy?
- ✦ How any problems in the relationship might be handled?
- ✦ Whether the person follows particular schools of therapy? What this may 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 are¹ improving:

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

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