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3 Tips for Finding a Therapist

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Sometimes life throws us curveballs we can't quite deal with, and in those situations, the help of an experienced mental health professional can be invaluable. We know that to improve our bodies, we go to the gym, but we can also improve our mental health and resilience through the support of an experienced therapist. Just like picking a gym, however, there are some special tips for picking the perfect therapist for you.

Ask for recommendations

These recommendations can come from friends or family, or they can come from professionals in the community who have to deal with discretion all the time, such as a lawyer, accountant, dentist or physician. Just like a therapist, these people run business and provide services and refer clients to one another all the time, so you may get a good connection based on how entangled your local business community is.

Friends and family may be more intrusive than you prefer, but give them a chance to be supportive, also. You could also consider asking a therapist who is not your own for recommendations, such as your sister or best friend's therapist. If your sister really likes her therapist, the odds are good that the therapist will have a few good, solid referrals they can make for you.

Utilize your resources

Many workplaces have what is known as an Employee Assistance Program, or EAP. Whether in-house or outsourced, the purpose of the EAP is to provide private, discreet emotional support as part of an employee benefit package.

The Human Resources department is often the best resource for asking if your company has an EAP and how you can access it. Usually, you speak to a counselor for a small, set number of sessions at no charge to you. If you want or need to continue, they will recommend a therapist who takes your insurance.

School or university wellness clinics are another great resource to tap. If you have a child in school, there's probably a school counselor or nurse you can speak to who knows therapists in your district that you can refer your child to.

As for universities and colleges, they often have counseling centers as part of health services and student affairs, with qualified psychologists and social workers waiting to help. If you need more care than these individuals can provide, they have links to the community that they can hook you into, to make sure you don't get lost out there.

Also, if you are an alum or faculty, you should still be able to access the counseling center in order to get a referral.

Finally, there's insurance for those who have it. You can either search on your insurance company's website for a therapist who specializes in what you need, or you can connect with your insurance's customer service department to help find a therapist in the community. They'll take your insurance, they will have all the right professional credentials, and hopefully, you'll be able to find a good therapist that way.

Don't settle

Don't settle means two things. First of all, don't limit yourself by title. You could be referred to social workers, marriage and family therapists, a psychiatrist who provides psychotherapy, and more. The effectiveness of a therapist isn't limited by the letters after their name, so don't place too much stock in titles.

Second of all, it means don't settle for a therapist who isn't working for you. If you're uncomfortable with the therapist you've chosen, don't feel bad about changing therapists. It may take a few tries before you find the therapist that is the right fit for you, and you should keep searching until you find that therapist.

Some signs that you may need to change your therapist include not feeling heard, not feeling comfortable, a therapist who talks more than they listen, a therapist who is hung up on paperwork and procedure, or someone who is constantly giving advice or directive instead of helping you come to your own conclusions about what you'd like to do in your life.

No matter how your search shapes up, be proud of yourself for having the courage to admit that you can't handle your issues alone and seeking help. Take the necessary time and do the research you need to do to find a therapist who will help you move forward mentally and emotionally. Remember to stay open, honest and willing to do the work, and the therapeutic process will hopefully be beneficial to you.

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