

Streams Counseling Center at First Evangelical Free Church

How do I choose a therapist? What do I look for? At Streams, we hope to be with you in your search for a therapist who will match what you need. This guide is a compilation of several questions that might be helpful in this process. Know that we are praying for you and have hope for the healing God has for you. We can be reached at 891-1600.

Possibly helpful Guidelines for Selecting a Counselor

by Rob Jackson, MS, LPC, LMHC, NCC

Selecting a counselor can be difficult. Because each person and family is unique, several factors should be considered.

When selecting a therapist, consider three basic categories: the spiritual, the professional, and the practical. By understanding the importance of each category, and asking the following questions, you're well on your way to a worthwhile experience.

Spiritual Considerations

Counseling is inherently value laden. Your core values and those of your therapist need to match. Consider the following questions to ask a therapist:

Are you a Christian?

Most healthcare professionals, Christian or not, are in the profession because they want to be of service to others. This question is not meant to imply that non-Christian professionals have an "agenda" to harm Christian clients. Nevertheless, Christian counseling and secular counseling are literally worlds apart.

If yes, how does being a Christian impact your counseling? Do you pray with clients? Do you reference Scripture?

Christian therapists often have personal testimonies that reveal their life experiences. These stories may be shared to build empathy or to simply assure you of their faith experience.

Many Christian therapists pray with clients and reference Scripture within the session. Professional therapists respect the client's values, opinions, and requests. You should be aware that you have the right to refuse any type of therapeutic intervention offered.

Professional Considerations

The credentials of mental health professionals and their ethical codes can be confusing to those who are new to therapy. There are three basic levels of assistance:

Psychiatrist. These individuals have M.D. after their name, and are medical doctors or physicians. In addition to psychotherapy, they are trained and licensed to prescribe medicine. In most states, psychiatrists are the only mental health professional who may prescribe medicine.

Psychologist. These individuals may have one of several credentials, including, Ph.D. (doctorate of philosophy), Psy.D. (doctorate of psychology) or Ed.D. (doctorate of education). In most cases these mental health professionals provide counseling and psychological testing. Most states do not permit psychologists to prescribe medications.

Counselor. These individuals most often have master degrees in various disciplines, including

psychology, counseling and social work. Some of the credentials include L.P.C. (state licensed professional counselor), N.C.C. ([national certified counselor](#)), and L.C.S.W. (state licensed clinical social worker). These therapists provide counseling, and many are trained to provide psychological testing.

What are your degrees and major fields of study?

The descriptions provided above will increase your understanding.

Are you licensed or certified? If yes, by whom?

In most cases, a state license is necessary for the independent practice of a mental health professional. Certification may not be a requirement, but often demonstrates that a professional has made continuing education a priority.

Are you trained or specialized in any particular areas?

Specialization may not be an advantage if you don't need highly specialized treatment, which may cost up to 40 percent more than a general counselor. Consider your needs, and, if necessary, ask your therapist if your issues require a specialist.

How many clients have you treated with my type of issues?

Therapists should be able to give prospective clients a good idea of how familiar they are with particular issues. Ethical therapists are well aware of their limitations, and should offer referrals to other therapists in the event they lack the experience required by the client.

How do you define successful treatment?

Successful treatment may be difficult to define, and no therapist can guarantee improvement. However, both the therapist and the client can set measurable therapeutic goals. Here are some questions that will help you to evaluate your experience:

- *Has my practical faith in Jesus Christ grown to offset personal distress and clinical symptoms?*
- *Has measurable progress been made in every goal initiated during the therapeutic process?*
- *Am I symptom free, or has my coping with the symptoms improved?*

What theoretical approaches do you follow in therapy?

There are many approaches adopted and adapted by mental health professionals. As a Christian client your primary need is to determine if any of the therapeutic approaches contain strategies or content that would be detrimental to your spirit. You will also want to ensure that the approaches address the total person: body, mind, and spirit. Comprehensive approaches, like [the Iceberg](#), seek to integrate the body, mind, and spirit by addressing behaviors, thoughts, emotions, and one's relationship with Christ.

Have you ever been in therapy?

This question may surprise you, but a counselor who has gone through therapy will actually be better equipped in many cases to address your specific concerns. Believing that we are all wounded in life, would you rather trust your own care to someone who has gone through the healing process or one who hasn't?

Practical Considerations

What is your hourly rate, and are your services typically reimbursed by insurance companies?

Hourly rates vary based on academic training, licensure, specialty, experience, and locale. Outpatient services do not typically require pre-certification, but to be on the safe side, you will want to look at your particular policy.

How often should we meet?

Be sure to ask about office hours. You may be able to find a therapist who works on the weekends and evenings. Of course, location will be a variable, also. Given the importance of your concerns and what

you hope to accomplish you may have to forfeit some conveniences in order to find the right therapist.

Does this counselor seem like a good fit?

In the first few sessions you should be able to form a basic impression of the therapist.

- *Does he or she put you on edge or make you feel comfortable?*
- *Is the therapist also asking questions to learn more about you?*
- *Does he or she listen to what you are saying or try to pigeonhole you into an assessment you are not comfortable with?*

A number of qualities will ensure a healthy counseling experience, but the most important one is trust. If you do not trust the counselor, it is unlikely he will be able to help you in the long run.

An offer of help

If you are still afraid to seek out help or are unsure if you can go through all these steps, call FEFC at 891-1600 or the Focus on the Family [Counseling Department](#) at (719) 531-3400 x7700 from 9:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. (MST) Monday through Friday. The Focus on Family trained, professional staff can help you through the process and offer recommendation for Christian counselors in your area.

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Type of desired solution

In addition, examine what type of solution you desire. Would you like some immediate relief from the stressor(s), after which the conflict may return? Or would you like to look at the root of why the issue generates stress for you in the first place? If you are looking for some relief, you will look for a therapist who operates from a Behavioral perspective. If you are looking for insight and to deal with the roots of the issue(s), then you will look for a therapist who operates from a more analytic perspective.

Other resources:

American Association of Christian Counselors: www.aacc.net

American Counseling Association: www.counseling.org

Center for Relational Care: www.relationalcare.org 492-6200

FEFC Pastor emergency line: 891-1600

Focus on the Family Counseling Center www.family.org 719/531-3400 x 7700

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