HOW TO CHOOSE A COUNSELOR OR THERAPIST

The decision to begin therapy is often made with a range of feelings, varying from eagerness to anxiety or ambivalence. This experience is normal and clearly understood by effective therapists as being part of the initial process.

There exist a variety of different types of therapist, with different types of clinical orientations and educational degrees. Marriage and Family Therapists have Masters Degrees, and are licensed as a M.F.C.C. or M.F.T. Social workers usually have Masters Degrees, and have L.C.S.W. licenses (or D.S.W. licenses if they have a Doctoral Degree). Clinical psychologists have Ph.D. degrees and are Licensed Psychologists. Finally, psychiatrists are physicians, having earned M.D. degrees with specialization in treating mental health disorders. At this time in the state of California, only psychiatrists can prescribe medication.

Fees for service vary widely, depending on the where the service is provided and the provider. For CSUN’s currently enrolled students there is no charge for services. There are community mental health clinics that provide services for fees based on ability to pay, (sometimes ranging from $5.00 to $50.00 per session). In private practice offices, therapy fees have a broad range (anywhere from about $30.00 to $175.00 per session). Most health insurance plans do provide coverage for mental health treatment, sometimes with specifications about the number of sessions and provider.

When selecting a therapist, practical considerations (such as fees, payment system, insurance coverage, accessibility of location) are important to consider. Equally important, however, are a range of issues regarding personality style, professionalism, likeability, and style of communication. Since you are going to be sharing your most private thoughts and feelings with this individual it is extremely important that you feel comfortable with them. You must like their presentation, being wary of any excessive claims, self-promotion or unprofessional marketing.

In the private practice sector, it is not unreasonable to interview therapists (i.e. paying for an initial session to meet with them and evaluate whether you feel their respect, warmth, and an interpersonal connection.) Unfortunately in campus counseling centers and community clinics this option is usually not available because of time restraints and caseload demands.

Nonetheless, allow yourself to feel compassion and respect by your therapist. The journey will be a partnership of utmost importance (with you contributing your part), and ultimately can provide you with a new way of experiencing your life.

http://www.calpsy.net/txt/a4.htm