

Choosing a Therapist

By Patricia Morgan MA CCC

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A client once shared her experience of counselling with me. She described in-depth personal exploration, awakening her feelings to being more authentic and discovering optional solutions while I served as a mirror for reflection and a light showing hope for the future. She also appreciated my invitations to experiment with new behaviours and the occasional mutual laugh at life's absurdities. The therapeutic relationship is best when it is a dance of healing connection.

To find the right and perfect therapist do some research. A therapist may have credentials as a certified counselor, psychologist, social worker or practicing nurse. Each has slightly different training. Personal coaches are not therapists and range from having no training to several years. Their role is different than a therapist's. Personal coach, Sherri Olsen, says "Coaching is about the future: whereas therapy involves resolving past issues in order to provide healing." Personal coaches can help you put a success strategy in place and keep you accountable to your goals.

Evaluate and decide your values and needs. What is it you want to change? What do you want to be saying and doing differently? Remember, therapy helps you psychologically heal and change old defeating habits. Ask friends and trusted people for recommendations. Most crisis lines, rape crisis centres and women's shelters have referral lists.

Many therapists will discuss your needs on the phone or meet with you for an introductory visit. Persist with questions that help you feel safe about sharing your private thoughts and deepest concerns. Here are some suggested questions:

- What training or credentials to you have?
- How long have you provided therapy?
- From what perspective do you work? Feminist? Family oriented? Behavioural? Rational Emotive? What does that mean?
- Do you explore family of origin beliefs and habits?
- What other techniques do you tend to use? Hypnosis? Questions? EMDR? NLP? Body focused? Solution focused?
- Have you engaged in therapy yourself? If not, why not?
- How much do you charge? (If appropriate) Is your fee flexible?
- How do you handle crisis calls?

Therapy at Its Best

When seeing a therapist it is important that you feel connected and supported. At an initial meeting, notice if you are treated with respect and as a unique human being. Observe if the therapist does more speaking than you. You should be the focus and do the majority of the talking and emotional work. Expect to be challenged on unhealthy thoughts, beliefs or decisions. You can change them once you are aware of them.

Sometimes, therapy can feel uncomfortable but it is working if you develop more skills to take care of yourself and your primary relationships, if you increase your tolerance of a broader range of feelings, if you begin to recognize self defeating habits and create healthier ones. At some point you will feel satisfied with your therapeutic accomplishments and end the relationship. May you be smiling as you say “goodbye and thank you” to your therapist and change agent.

Warning: If a therapist wants to have a sexual relationship with you, leave.

Patricia Morgan, Light Hearted Concepts

Phone: 403-242-7796

Email: patricia@lightheartedconcepts.com

Website: lightheartedconcepts.com