5 STEPS TO FIND A MENTAL HEALTH THERAPIST IN PINELLAS COUNTY

Discover your path to happiness again

WRITTEN BY HOME AGAIN COUNSELING. EXPERTS IN TEEN AND YOUNG ADULT MENTAL HEALTH
FINDING A MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR IS HARD. FINDING THE “RIGHT” COUNSELOR IS EVEN HARDER.

Steps to find the right therapist

1. LEARN TO IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM
2. DETERMINE HOW YOU'RE GOING TO PAY FOR THERAPY
3. THINK ABOUT WHAT WOULD MAKE YOU THE MOST COMFORTABLE DURING THERAPY. (DISTANCE, GENDER, AGE PREFERENCE, ETC...)
4. RESEARCH THERAPISTS IN YOUR AREA
5. SET UP YOUR INITIAL APPOINTMENT
A few months ago, we were trying to find a new accountant. The first thing we did was ask around for referrals. Friends, family, coworkers; we asked everyone. When asking for a reputable accountant, no one seemed uncomfortable with the request. And the process was fairly quick. By the end of the week we had chosen an accountant and had a meeting scheduled.

Asking around for a counselor or therapist is a different story. Asking for mental health help still has a stigma or black cloud around it. Seeking out mental health services does not make someone crazy.

This guide aims to make the process of finding the right therapist easier and less stressful. There are several steps that you can follow and we'll cover them all in this guide.
STEP 1: IDENTIFY THE PROBLEM

The best way to do this is by asking yourself, “how do I vent?” We all vent to people when we are stressed out. It could be with your spouse, friend, parent, or coworker.

Pay attention to the language you use and how you define your “problem”.
- “I get so frustrated with everyone”
- “I feel so overwhelmed”
- “They don’t get me anymore”
- “I hate my job”

Next, pay attention to your behavior. Whenever someone first reaches out to me for counseling, they may say “I think I might be depressed” or “-My teen gets angry all the time”. I always ask what “being depressed or being angry” looks like? How would an outsider be able to tell if you’re angry or depressed?

Understanding and being able to put your challenges into words will help communicate your NEEDS to both the potential therapist and yourself. I tell my clients that the first step to change is “awareness”. Being able to verbalize your challenges is a great first step towards finding the right therapist.
Step #2: Determine how you're going to pay for therapy

Option #1 Self pay
This is when you have to pay out of pocket or you elect to not use any insurance or Employee Assistance Plan (EAP) benefits.

Option #2 Insurance Plans
Another option is finding a therapist through your insurance company. Each insurance company has a directory of providers. However, this process can feel overwhelming and become frustrating.

Insurance company websites can be difficult to navigate. For example, you can search counseling options by people, places, or areas of expertise. Which is fine, however once you get to the next screen of names it doesn't offer much more than the provider's education and address. Clicking on a provider's name does not offer a bio about that person. (Tip on this later in the guide)

Pay attention to the addresses of providers. If there are a large number of providers with the same address it indicates that this is community mental health provider or group practice. There's nothing wrong with this, however there are differences between community mental providers and private practice providers (more about this later in the guide).
EAP

Employment Assistance Plans (EAP)- Major companies offer Employee Assistance Programs (EAP) as a free benefit to their employees. Pinellas County schools, Baycare, St. Anthonys, Publix, and the city of St. Pete all offer EAP services. Your human resources department will be able to give you more information.

EAP counseling sessions typically only cover a set amount of sessions. Generally, it will be something like 6 to 8. EAP benefits can be used personally, or for family sessions. EAP companies also have directories.

**Insider tip**- After you gather a few names on the insurance/EAP directory search for their website or Psychology Today profile. This information will give you a better idea if they are a good fit.

**Insider tip**- In order to use insurance benefits a therapist must prove “Medical necessity” for the services. A therapist proves medical necessity by diagnosing their clients with a mental health disorder. Therefore there is no such thing as insurance companies paying for preventative care.

---

**Step #3 Discover your comfort zone**

Choosing the right therapist is a choice.

These are questions to ask yourself when looking for a therapist.

- Do I want to see a male or female?
- Culturally competent- Does race or religious background matter?
- Does the age of your therapist matter?
- How far am I willing to travel for sessions?
- What times are you available to see a therapist?
- Do you want your session in person or online?
STEP #4: DO YOUR RESEARCH

Want to find something? Most people these days will just “Google” it. Googling can be an effective way to find a therapist. Type in keywords that describe the problem you're experiencing. This could include things like:

- Anxiety counseling in St. Petersburg
- Teen counselor for depressed teen in St. Petersburg
- Couple counseling near me

Sometimes Google will give you a listing of therapists in the area. However, it will most likely direct you to three main directories of therapists called Psychology Today, Good Therapy, or Therapy Den.

When you reach Psychology Today it can be overwhelming at first, but because you're prepared (since you completed step 1) this isn't a problem. You can filter through the directory to get exactly what you need. You can sort by area code, gender, specialty, cost, and payment options (insurance or private pay).

Be open minded! What you think you want isn't necessarily the best fit. Sometimes we may choose a therapist based solely on their physical appearance. This could be their gender, race, age, or the way they smile. While looking for someone that can connect with you is important, look at their credentials and experience related to your needs.

For example, if you are struggling with depression related to a recent trauma then filter your search for someone that specializes in working with trauma and depression. A generalist is not the same thing as a specialist. Just because Burger King has tacos doesn't mean you should order tacos from Burger King.
TYPES OF THERAPISTS

There are different qualifications for people that are practicing mental health therapists. When looking for a therapist you may come across people with different letters after their names.

What do they all mean? Here is a snapshot of some potential letters and their meanings.

**Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)** - Master's-Level clinicians that have a master's degree in clinical social work. They can provide assessments and a variety of psychotherapeutic interventions.

**Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC)** - Master's-Level clinicians have a master's degree in mental health counseling. They can provide assessments and a variety of psychotherapeutic interventions.

**Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT)** - Master's-Level clinicians have a master's degree in marriage and family therapy. They can provide assessments and a variety of psychotherapeutic interventions.

**Psychologists** - have a doctoral degree in either educational, child, clinical or counseling psychology. They can provide mental health assessments, psychological testing, and a variety of other services. Most offer psychotherapy treatments as well. Psychologists are not medical doctors.

**Psychiatrists** - are medical doctors who specialize in the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of mental or behavioral disorders. Psychiatrists can provide psychiatric evaluations, prescribe medication, and offer psychotherapy treatments. Most are board-certified in psychiatry and neurology.

**Insider tip** - If a person has “registered” in their title this means they are working under a licensed professional and are not fully licensed.

**Insider tip** - Counseling and coaching are not the same thing. Life coaches help their clients set and meet certain goals. Life coaches are not healthcare professionals. Therapists are state licensed and are able to diagnose and help individuals with everything from past traumas and issues to painful feelings.
FINDING THE RIGHT THERAPIST FOR YOUR CHILD OR TEEN

Talk to your child’s school social worker or school counselor.

There is a common misconception of what a school social worker does. Most people think social workers only take kids away. Yes, that is one kind of social worker. However, school social workers provide information to families in need and provide crisis counseling to students. Not sure of the names of your child’s social worker or school counselor? Call the school’s front office.

Each school in Pinellas County has a school social worker or school counselor. They will be able to direct you to the right place. Justin worked as a school social worker in Pinellas county for four years. Justin remembers helping a student with a new backpack. The student later told his mom that “my school social worker helped me with a new backpack” The student’s mother later called me freaking out about the social worker talking to her child.

School social workers and counselors will be able to provide community-based mental health options as well. In Pinellas county there are several community-based mental health options.

- Suncoast Center
- Directions for Living
- Sequel Care

Insider tip: Has your teen or family just experienced a crisis? School social workers and counselors also provide short term crisis counseling.
WHAT ARE COMMUNITY-BASED OPTIONS?

Community based mental health options offer a variety of different services such as individual counseling, group counseling, med management and also potentially in-home counseling services. The turnover rate is normally higher in community-based mental health settings compared to private practice settings. This may make it difficult to keep the same therapist for a long period of time.

Q: Should your child have a say in what therapist you choose?

A: Yes- to an extent. One of the biggest predictors in whether or not therapy is successful depends on how strong the therapeutic relationship (the relationship between the therapist and client) is. Parents should pick out three different acceptable therapists and then let the child choose or vice versa. The most important takeaway is that your child feels that they are part of the decision-making process. Especially when it’s something they have to “commit to”.

STEP #5: I THINK I FOUND A THERAPIST NOW WHAT?

Your next step is to schedule a consultation call. Most therapists will offer a free consultation phone call. This is a good way to ask the potential therapist questions and to get a good feel for who they are and if they’re a good fit on the phone.

What questions should I ask?

- Are you accepting new clients?
- What is the wait time for an appointment?
- Do you accept my insurance? (if using insurance coverage)
- Where are you located?