

“Good Fit” Therapy: What it Means and Guidelines For How to Find It

Making the decision to begin therapy can be a difficult, but powerful step in creating a happier and healthier life for yourself. The obvious next step is to choose a therapist, but where to begin? With all the different titles, credentials and acronyms out there, this task can feel daunting, confusing and perhaps even a little scary.

Here are a few things to consider as you begin your search for your own “good fit” therapist.

1.) Personal Connection with Your Therapist

Therapy is a place for people to feel heard, respected, validated and supported. A quality therapy process feels open, collaborative, accepting and genuine. A good therapist is trained to provide insights, awareness and skills to help you with your presenting concerns. You should expect that your therapist will listen, reflect and help you explore and understand your presenting concerns in ways that are meaningful and helpful for you.

A good connection with your therapist leads to deepened trust in the healing relationship. Trusting in your therapist and believing that your therapist “has your back” so to speak, can help you to disclose the stories or information that make you feel most vulnerable. The therapeutic alliance can also help you to bolster up the necessary courage to lean in to the discomfort of change and growth. Because of this, I would argue that a “felt connection” with your therapist is the most important criteria for you to pay attention to when looking for a professional who is right for you.

2.) Credentials

Licensure, training and experience – these are all important factors to consider when choosing your therapist. For a number of reasons, I typically recommend that consumers work with a licensed professional. Licensed clinicians are required to pass a written examination, in addition to completing hundreds to thousands of supervised clinical hours in order to receive their licensure. Not only can you be confident that these individuals have a solid, base knowledge within their chosen field, but you can also be assured that these professionals are bound to follow the legal and ethical guidelines put forth by the State of Colorado.

Licensed psychotherapists must obtain at least a two-year Master's degree in counseling, social work or marriage and family therapy in order to gain licensure in the State of Colorado. Many people who are looking to participate in traditional talk therapy see one of these professionals. There are a number of MA degrees in psychotherapy including:

- Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC)
- Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist (LMFT)
- Licensed Social Worker (LSW)
- Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)

In addition to licensure, some therapists will have additional training or certifications in specific areas (e.g. Certified Sex Therapist (CST), Emotionally Focused Therapy (EFT), Eye Movement Desensitization & Reprocessing (EMDR), art therapy, play therapy, etc.). These additional specialized trainings and experiences can make these professionals unique in terms of the skills and techniques they can bring to bear with clients.

Licensed Psychologists (LP) are slightly different in that their training includes a few additional years of graduate work that ends with either a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD) or Doctorate of Psychology (PsyD). This additional training allows psychologists to provide more formal psychological testing in addition to traditional talk therapy. Psychologists cannot prescribe medication, but they can provide clients with formalized psychological tests and assessments, if this is something that the client feels that he or she may require.

Psychiatrists are medical doctors (MD) with specialized training in the diagnosis and treatment of mental health concerns. Psychiatrists can prescribe medication, but often these professionals do not provide counseling to patients. When looking for a psychiatrist, it is important to make sure the person is licensed and board-certified.

In addition to the professional's training and credentials, you will also want to consider the professional's level of experience.

3.) Therapeutic Orientation & Style

All therapists have an individual style that they bring to therapy. It is important for you to feel like the therapist's orientation and style fit your personality and therapeutic needs.

Some therapists are more structured, while others are less so. Some therapists are extremely direct and bold in their approach with clients, while others are more gentle and collaborative. Some therapists use humor, while others tend to be more serious. Some therapists come from a psychoanalytic orientation (typically, deeper work that looks at the effects from past relationships and experiences, but often much more time consuming), while other therapists pull from solution-based methods (goal-oriented therapy that focuses less at the past and instead focuses more on present and future).

4.) Other Practical Things to Consider That Effect “Good Fit”

- *Location* – How far are you willing or able to travel? Is the therapist located in an area that is convenient for you? Will you be able to get to your appointments with ease?
- *Cost* – Are the therapist’s rates affordable for you? Does it make sense to see a more highly trained therapist, who is more expensive, less frequently or would you better served by working with someone who offers less expensive services, so that you could attend therapy more frequently and consistently? Does the professional accept insurance?
- *Demographics* – Do you feel more comfortable working with a male or female therapist? Does age, race, religion or sexual orientation matter to you? Essentially, when it comes to the demographic piece, it is important that you be honest with yourself about the factors that would help you to feel more comfortable with the therapist, right from the beginning of the process.
- *Availability* – How urgent is your concern? Does the therapist have availability that works with your timeframe?

If you think about these different factors, and honestly think about what’s right for you, you’re much more likely to find a therapist that fits your needs, who will help you to reach your therapeutic goals. I find that with my clients, assuring good fit is an important part of the therapeutic process, one that has proven incredibly helpful. I hope this article will help you to find a therapist that fits your own needs, as you journey towards a happier and healthier life!