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## How to Choose a Psychotherapist

By Moshe Ratson, MBA, MS MFT, LMFT - Founder of [spiral2grow](http://spiral2grow.com)

### GUIDELINES FOR CHOOSING AND KEEPING A THERAPIST

If you are looking for a therapist or a psychotherapist or you are already in therapy, consider the checklist below. This list could also be helpful to assess the ability of the therapist to meet your needs and provide you with effective counseling treatment.

#### **Find a therapist who:**

1. **Makes You Feel Comfortable:** You have to find a good match for your personality. Find a therapist with whom you feel comfortable and is warm and accepting. The therapist should create a nurturing and safe environment for therapy, yet is willing to challenge you when necessary.
2. **Accepts You:** A therapist should respect you as an individual, your background and your opinions.
3. **Can Be Trusted:** A therapist should be someone you have a rapport with and someone you can trust. If you cannot be open with your therapist, then you will not get the help you need and results you want.
4. **Is Experienced and Professional:** A therapist should be educated, an expert in the field and competent. If a therapist breaks appointments often, arrives late, or allows interruptions, consider leaving the therapist.
5. **Is Emotionally Healthy:** A therapist should feel comfortable with himself/herself and not seem anxious, arrogant or depressed. Look for someone who appears confident and is relaxed.
6. **Is Respectful:** The therapist should always be respectful and decent, and never condescending.
7. **Does NOT Guarantee Results:** Regardless of the best effort put forth by the therapist and the client, NO ONE can guarantee results. So, be careful when a therapist PROMISES you results. However, if after two months you don't see/feel some change, consider replacing your therapist.
8. **Is Available for a Phone Interview:** Before a first meeting, a therapist should be available to have a 10 to 15 minute phone conversation so that you can interview him/her and get a sense of his/her style and your comfort level. Also, the therapist should be able to accept the idea that clients are entitled to shop around before they commit to any therapist.
9. **Provides Therapeutic Guidelines:** A therapist should provide you with a clear policy and guidelines, including confidentiality, a consent form, clients' rights, etc.
10. **Is Patient:** The therapist should allow you to explain your problems and patiently listen and not diagnose you prematurely.
11. **Is Proactive and Engaged:** A therapist who is too silent or too talkative is not going to be a good fit for most people. If the therapist does not promote interactive dialogue, does not answer most questions or pretends to be a "blank screen," consider changing your therapist.

12. **Is Open-Minded:** A therapist should accept the idea that a consultation or second opinion may be helpful in the course of therapy.
13. **Has a Flexible Approach:** A therapist should be flexible in his clinical orientation and fit his/her model to the client's specific problems/needs instead of imposing his/her approach on all patients. A good therapist begins with the needs of the client and then moves forward to find the appropriate intervention.
14. **Provides Assignments:** The therapist should recognize the needs of the client to work outside the therapy room. The therapist should also provide assignments from time-to-time to reinforce the therapy process.
15. **Is Available in a Crisis:** The therapist can be reached by phone or email to briefly discuss the crisis.
16. **Allows a Variety of Participants:** At times, it is helpful to bring your friend/partner, child, parent, etc with you to therapy. The therapist should be flexible in terms of who can participate in sessions as well as the frequency of the sessions.
17. **Maintains Boundaries:** It is critical to maintain clear and healthy boundaries. No business offers are permitted. Any sexual relationship is malpractice. If you feel something is wrong with the relationship or if you feel exploited in ANY way, seriously consider leaving the therapist.
18. **Addresses Present Challenges:** While it is important to discuss the background and childhood of the client, the therapist must help the client deal with real-present life issues.
19. **Doesn't Make Decisions For You:** A therapist should not make your decisions, but rather provide you with the skills and the process to understand your situation, the options available and their consequences to allow you to make the decision.
20. **Is Authentic and Client-Centered:** A therapist is expected to be authentic and real while keeping in mind that the therapy is about the client. A therapist who reveals too much or irrelevant information about himself/herself is taking the therapy away from being productive.
21. **Conducts Ongoing Evaluations:** A therapist should conduct regular evaluations and seek client's opinion regarding the progress of the therapy and revise his/her intervention accordingly.
22. **Is Open to Feedback:** A therapist should be open to feedback from the client regarding the therapy process and adjust the intervention accordingly. Therapy can be difficult and, at times, clients may become frustrated with the entire process so it is important to discuss these feelings with the therapist.
23. **Communicates Clearly:** A therapist should be direct, open and honest and communicate effectively with all family members, regardless of their age and personality.
24. **Is NOT Eager to Please:** A therapist shouldn't be too eager to please. Instead, the therapist should challenge his client and be proactive.

**Please feel free to contact Moshe Ratson for additional information.**

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