

How to Find An Outpatient Counselor **By Peggy L. Ferguson, Ph.D.**

I am often asked for referrals for marriage and family therapists that also work with addiction. These requests come from all parts of the country or even from other parts of the world. While I do not have the contact resources to make those recommendations, there are some resources available to help you find an appropriate counselor or therapist--wherever you are.

Although there are a number of therapist referral sites online, I don't know much about them. I would tend to shy away from sites where therapists have to pay to be listed, because your choices will be small. You need to know what kind of therapist you need to best be able to use a therapist finder service. Things to take into consideration are:

- 1) The type of sessions you need - individual, family, marital, or group,
- 2) The types of issues that are most important to deal with - marital, mental health, addiction, or a combination (i.e., addicted spouse, marital problems),
- 3) The qualifications of therapists that would provide the best fit for your situation (i.e., mental health - possibly psychologist or licensed professional counselor, or other licensed professionals according to their state statutes on scope of practice).

A good example of finding the appropriate fit would be to look for a professional who is licensed as a marriage and family therapist and as an alcohol/drug counselor for dealing with addiction in a marriage).

Once you have a good idea about the kind of help you need, follow these steps to use a therapist referral service:

- 1) Go to your therapist referral service such as the one on Psychology Today's website,
- 2) Click on "find a therapist" or something similar that will achieve the same results,
- 3) Search your location,
- 4) Look for a professional that has the kinds of credentials you are looking for. There are psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers, licensed professional counselors, licensed marriage and family therapists, licensed alcoholism/drug counselors.

Other ways to find an appropriate referral is to ask friends and colleagues. Ask people at church or at work for a recommendation for a good therapist. If you are attending AA or some other 12 step group, ask the people in the meetings. They know who the best therapists are. You can also call licensing boards or go to their websites and look for professionals according to your location.

Once you have some names and phone numbers, call them. Ask them questions about their services. Such questions might include their specialty, costs, types of insurance they take (if any), typical frequency of sessions according to your issues (i.e.

mild depression), what kind of therapeutic approaches they use (i.e. Cognitive behavioral therapy, etc.), specialty population that they work with (i.e., seniors, adolescents, adults, alcoholics/addicts, right-handed artists, etc.). If you get voice mail, leave a message for them to return your call. Make sure that you speak slowly and distinctly when you leave your name and number, so that they can call you back. People often assume that a counselor has simply chosen not to return their call, when in fact, the message left on the machine was not understandable.

Make appointments. Try some out. Make sure that they are interested in your goals for therapy and that you have some level of comfort with them. If they don't seem to fit after a few sessions, try someone else. The number one factor in successful outcomes for therapy is the relationship between the therapist and the patient/client.

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