**How to Determine if a Counselor is the Right Fit for You**

It may be easy to find a counselor but perhaps more difficult to know if you’ve found one who is right for you. There are a number of questions you can ask that will help you determine if a counselor is an appropriate fit for your needs.

1. What does it feel like for you to sit with the therapist? Do you feel safe and comfortable? Is it easy to make small talk? Is the person down to earth and easy to relate to or does he or she feel cold and emotionally removed? Does the therapist have a “know it all” attitude? For many of us, going to a therapist for the first time is a bit anxiety provoking, but that does not necessarily mean the counselor is not the right fit for you. Try out a few sessions, but if ultimately a counselor does not feel like a good fit for you, that’s okay; there’s absolutely no contract or rule requiring you to continue working with any counselor. However, it’s important to check to see if there’s a part of you avoiding therapy through a dislike or judgment of the therapist. If you find yourself reacting negatively to every counselor you see, then the issue could be yours and may warrant you sticking it out with a counselor in an effort to work through your fears of beginning therapy.

2. What is the counselor’s general philosophy and approach to helping? Does your counselor approach human beings in a compassionate and optimistic way?

3. Can the counselor clearly define how he or she can help you to solve whatever issue or concern has brought you to therapy? Experienced counselors explain how they can help, are able to give you a basic “road map,” to their approach, and can even give an indication of how you will know when therapy is finished.

4. Can your counselor accept feedback and admit mistakes? A healthy counselor is open to feedback and to learning that something he or she said hurt or offended you. Good therapists are willing to look at themselves, to check their feelings, and to honestly and openly admit mistakes.

5. Does the counselor encourage independence? Good therapy doesn’t solve your problems; it helps you to solve your own. Likewise, good therapy doesn’t soothe your overwhelming feelings; it helps you learn to soothe your own feelings. Like the old proverb, therapy is most powerful when it helps people to learn to fish for themselves rather than rely on another to feed them. If your counselor provides wisdom, answers, or emotional support without encouraging you to access your own resources, it is more likely you will become dependent on your therapist to help you feel better, rather than learning to depend on yourself.

6. Does the therapist have experience helping others with the particular issues for which you are seeking therapy? The more experience therapists have addressing a particular issue, concern, or problem area, the more expertise they have developed.

7. Does your counselor adhere to ethical principles in regard to issues such as boundaries, dual relationships, and confidentiality? There are numerous ethical guidelines designed to keep counselors from harming clients. Most important, there is a guideline barring against dual relationships. When a therapist enters into a therapeutic relationship with a client, he or she should not have any other relationship with that person, such as teacher, friend, employer, or family member.

8. Is the counselor licensed? Licensure implies that a counselor has engaged in extensive postgraduate counseling experience and has passed a licensing exam. You can contact your State Professional Licensing Board to verify the licensure of a provider.

Common types of mental health licensure in Maryland include:

* PhD: Psychologist
PsyD: Psychologist
* LCSW-C: Clinical Social Worker
* LCPC: Masters Level Clinician with graduate degree in Psychology
* LMFT: Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

While these are some general guidelines about selecting a counselor, it is ultimately a personal decision to determine if a particular provider is the right fit for your needs. If you are unsure about a counselor’s style or approach, talk with them about it. Therapy is to benefit you, so you should feel comfortable openly discussing any concerns about the therapist or how sessions are conducted with them. If you have questions or concerns, please contact Jen Stevens, Student Care Coordinator in the Counseling Center at 410-617-CARE (2273).