

Part 2: Choosing a Therapist; Advocating for Yourself

Remember that you are actively advocating for yourself. Every phone call, every message, every Google search is a straightening of your spine and a clearing of your throat. You are worthy of this. You deserve to be witnessed and understood.

As I move into logistics, I'm switching to a numbered list because my brain likes to organize this type of information hierarchically. I find that numbered steps are somehow manageable to me, primarily because I can focus on one at a time. Remember what I said about this process taking time and energy? Pace yourself, and be kind if the only thing you do in a day is read the first sentence. You still did something for yourself. You are aware of your worth, and you'll read the second—maybe even third—tomorrow.

Finding a Therapist

1. Focus on finding a quality provider.

- a. If you have insurance, search your network.

- i. You may want to tailor your search parameters to include distance from your home, work, school, childcare provider, etc. Depending on the day and time of your appointment, you could be travelling straight from work to therapy and making sure that the commute does not add additional stress into your life is key.

- ii. Also note that most appointments range from 45 minutes to an hour, with your initial appointment lasting closer to an hour. This is important to note for traffic purposes, sure, but also? Meal times. Many people see their therapists on their lunch break and eat on the way to or from the appointment, and the same can be said for dinner. If either of these times are your best availability, make sure you pack snacks and/or **meals.****

- b. If you do not have insurance, there are still a number of options for you.

.Keep your focus on quality, but balance that with attainability. You'll still want to search for a provider within driving distance for you or your local transit, but your search can begin from a variety of places like:

1. Asking your employer's Human Resources department if they have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP), which is designed to help employees through difficult situations. Therapy is included in most programs.
2. Federally funded health centers provide income-based payment plans and many of them include mental health services. The [Health Resources & Services Administration](#) has a searchable database; just plug in your zip code, define your search parameters, and they'll populate a list of centers in your area.
3. Asking your current primary care physician for a recommendation. Since they know you, they can likely recommend someone local who will be able to work with you.
4. If you are a college student, utilizing your college or university counseling center (who can also refer you elsewhere if you so choose.)
5. If you live near a college or university, most graduate psychology departments have counseling centers for people in the community.

Check their website or call the department's administrative assistant, who will be able to forward your call directly.

6. [Psychology Today](#) offers a Find a Therapist search feature that lets you search by city and filter by insurance, specialty, sexuality, gender, age, language, faith, and treatment orientation.
 7. Some therapists and community organizations offer support groups for a flat fee. The [Psychology Today](#) search will allow you to apply that filter, and your local Health Department should be able to provide a list of support groups.
 8. [The Anxiety and Depression Association of America \(AADA\)](#) has a similar search feature, and their website has a wealth of information.
2. Once you've found a number (I'd start with 4-6) of providers, look at their qualifications and—my personal favorite—their websites.

I'm attaching a note-taking chart I've used in the past when I've relocated and had to find a new therapist. If this helps you collect your information and make a decision, awesome! If not, spit your gum into it and keep reading.

I chose my current therapist because of her personal biography on her practice's (practice = basically a group of therapists with different specialties) website. She expressed experience working with people with Depression and Anxiety (people like me!), and she seemed passionate about her work. It's worth noting that I'm a writing instructor, so that likely plays a part in my selection, but I think you'll be more likely to schedule an appointment with someone because you've familiarized yourself with the therapist, their specialty, and the mission/vision of the practice, if stated.

3. If you are visiting websites for specific practices, note the names of 1-2 therapists that you feel fit your needs just in case only one of the two is accepting new patients. Even if you begin treatment with one therapist, you can switch to another; doing so in the same practice may be easier because they already have your insurance and billing information, making for an easy transition.

4. If the Google searching/website perusing narrowed down your list, perfect! It's time to make some phone calls! If this made you nauseous, you are not alone. Promise. I got a little queasy just writing that sentence because I remember every single call and voicemail I had to make to find a therapist I liked who was accepting new patients.

1. If you have never called a therapist's office before, keep your notes sheet in front of you while you dial the number and can look at the name of the therapist if you forget when asked. This happens all the time—don't be embarrassed. You dialed the number and are saying the words, friend—this is big.
2. Introduce yourself and ask if the therapist or therapists you like are accepting new patients. If so, be prepared with dates and times you're able to meet. I have cancelled on family, friends, coworkers, and my DVR to go to therapy because it's important. If you have to cancel plans, it's okay. You can reschedule...unless the friends who you cancel on act like assholes when you tell them that you can't make it because you have therapy, in which case you'll never reschedule because, in the immortal words of Taylor Swift, we are never ever ever getting back together.
3. The receptionist will also likely ask for your insurance information and perhaps your address to send you copies of intake forms that you'll need fill out prior to your visit. Sometimes these are on the practice's website,

so you'll just download them, fill them out, and bring them to your first appointment.

4. If the therapist(s) aren't accepting patients, ask for a referral. I live in a relatively rural area, so local therapists are happy to refer patients to other offices.