

Question 9: In your opinion, what makes a good Psychologist (Counselor, Therapist and Psychiatrist)? How can I find one that is right for me?

To be effective, psychotherapy needs to be provided in a way that meets a set of well-defined criteria. In a recent American Psychological Association symposium a list of basic criteria was talked about in what makes a good therapist. They include the ability for the therapist to express themselves well and are astute at sensing what other people are thinking and feeling. In relating to their clients, they show warmth and acceptance, empathy, and a focus on others, not themselves. Clients of effective therapists believe that their therapists will be helpful because the therapist communicates both verbally and non-verbally that he or she is someone the client can trust. Effective therapists are able to form good therapeutic alliances with many types of patients. Effective therapists provide explanations of symptoms that clients can understand but they are also willing to shift according to the way in which treatment unfolds. Effective therapist help their clients to feel secure in the knowledge that the therapists know what they're doing and why. Effective therapists inspire and give hope and at the same time know how to strike a balance between realism and hope. An effective therapist is self-aware and is able to separate his or her own issues from those of clients. It's important for therapists to be able to identify and manage their responses to the issues their clients present to them.

Licensed mental health professionals must participate in continuing education to maintain their credentials. They are required by law to seek and complete this training. As long as your therapist has a current license, you can be assured that he or she is acquiring relevant educational and training experiences.

When looking for the right therapist for you, ask friends who are in therapy if they like their therapist. If they do, find out what it is they like about them and ask your friend if they think their therapist would be a good fit for you. Ask yourself if gender is important. If so, what do you need to consider? Is there a theoretical orientation that you are looking for or feel more comfortable with? Different orientations focus on different aspects of psychological growth. When you begin to consider a few names of therapists, call them and ask questions that are on your mind. You may want to find out what school they went to, what training they received and what they specialize in. Is this person licensed? What are the fees and do they take insurance? Try to get a feel for that person and trust your gut about how you feel about them.