



Self-empowerment

Choosing a mental health professional in California



 Self-
empowerment



It's your decision


Choosing a therapist

Your relationship with your mental health professional is vital to your success. If you use mental health services in California, you should feel comfortable asking some basic questions before choosing a therapist. The Board of Behavioral Sciences (Board) has prepared this booklet to help you make an informed decision.

Questions to ask your therapist

You may want to interview several candidates before making your choice. Start by giving the therapist or mental health professional a brief description of why you are seeking mental health services. Then, ask him or her for information such as:

- The name of the university or school he or she attended.
- The dates the degree and clinical license were granted.
- If he or she has experience dealing with issues like yours.
- How and when the length of treatment is determined.
- Whether he or she practices from a particular "model" of treatment, and if so, a brief description of that treatment and what it involves.
- If he or she has forensic experience (this question applies only if you need services because of a legal action, such as a child custody dispute).



Before choosing a mental health professional, interview several people to make sure you and your therapist will be a good match.

Questions continued....

- If he or she thinks you might need medication from a psychiatrist or other physician working with your therapist and, if so, whether the therapist can make a referral.
- If he or she can accommodate your schedule for therapy appointments.
- What the office policies are regarding cancellations, vacation coverage, and phone calls between sessions.

Assessment process

The assessment process usually consists of one to three sessions in which you talk with your therapist about your current situation and needs. Your individual and family histories are also discussed at this time. These meetings should give you a good idea of your therapist's style and whether or not he or she is a good match for your personality, clinical needs, and goals. If you are not comfortable with his or her style, you may wish to search for another therapist.

Treatment plan

At the end of the assessment process, your therapist should give you a working diagnosis and treatment plan. This plan should include a recommendation about the number of sessions and referrals for other services (i.e., referral for medication, testing of a child with learning problems) that you may need to effectively resolve your issues. You and your therapist should work together on your treatment plan. Remember—therapy is a process that requires time and effort from both you and your therapist.





