

## **How do I choose a therapist?**

This is by far the most important thing to get right. It's as important as 'location' when buying a house or having a good accountant if you are starting a business.

Therapy depends almost entirely on the therapeutic relationship. That means if you like your therapist, you trust your therapist and you feel that he or she listens and focuses on what's important to you then the likelihood of the whole process being worthwhile goes up exponentially.

Amongst therapists there is often light hearted debate on what therapy is best. I am very passionate about ACT and **could** talk about its merits until the cows come home. It's not just the therapy I use, I live and breathe it every day. And at the same time I have colleagues that swear by CBT or interpersonal therapy, compassion focused therapy or psychodynamic therapy. Scott D Millar <http://www.scottdmiller.com/> a very well-known and respected academic who has devoted himself to researching what makes therapy work, frequently highlights that there are many proven therapies that have produced excellent client outcomes. What makes the real difference is the quality of the client – therapist relationship.

### **Feeling Safe**

Some people have suffered many years trying unsuccessfully to avoid painful thoughts and feelings and the thought of talking to someone is truly frightening. A good therapist should exude warmth, respect and compassion. They should make you feel safe and instil trust. Evaluating this is not easy. Be guided by what you feel and what your body tells you. If the first session feels right, you are probably on to a good thing, if not, trust your instincts.

### **A good listener**

A therapist must be good at listening. The significance of being heard and having someone acknowledge and sit with you as you explore the challenges that have brought you to therapy is essential. This is often a strength of counsellors while some old school psychiatrists and psychologists can be too quick to focus on the steps required to move forward. Most people are not ready to consider moving forward until they have been truly heard. If your therapist is not an outstanding listener, consider therapist shopping.

### **The right connection**

Connecting with a human being is an amazing experience. It's your therapist's job to connect with you. To know when you want to talk about something on your mind and when you're ready to explore something new. They should be able to set the right pace, keep it relevant, real, and make sure you walk out the door feeling like you are heading in the right direction. If they talk too much, are pushing an agenda that's just not where you are at or leave you feeling at all frustrated then consider other options.

Therapy is no magic bullet and just like the cheese advert good things do take time but too many clients have engaged with the wrong therapist and stayed with them for too long for the wrong reasons. A good therapist will encourage you to come for an introduction session with no pressure to return. Use this to get a real sense of the connection. Trust your gut and don't invest in a process unless you feel confident your therapist is the right person for you.

Some things are worth doing right, make sure this is one of them.