



TRICK OR TREAT: HOW TO FIND A GOOD PSYCHOLOGIST

By Yvonne Thomas, Ph.D.

The decision to begin therapy can be a hard one to make since, understandably, people often try to utilize every OTHER resource available to them before seeking some expert assistance. Ultimately, however, there are times when one cannot reach resolution or feel at peace with oneself unless he or she can work some things out in therapy. The circumstances that can bring a person to therapy can range from being a longstanding issue to being a very new situation of concern. As unfamiliar and perhaps scary as it can be to start therapy, and in spite of any still enduring ERRONEOUS beliefs about people who go to therapy being “crazy” or “weak” or “dependent,” it is frequently the HEALTHIER AND EMOTIONALLY STRONGER person who comes to counseling rather than someone who keeps running away from or denying any need for help.

Once a person has decided to start therapy, the search to find the RIGHT therapist needs to begin. Sometimes an individual gets a referral from a friend or family member to a Psychologist who was effective. Or a person may look in the Yellow Pages or on the Internet to find a Psychologist. However, a person may have no Psychologist referrals or may have moved to Southern California recently and doesn't know about any Psychologists in the area, let alone the RIGHT one. It is CRITICAL to remember that knowing HOW to select the right Psychologist for you is probably AS important as actually making the decision to get some counseling in the first place.

There are several BASIC therapy factors to keep in mind when trying to select the best Psychologist for oneself. IN GENERAL, determine with yourself if you would rather work with a female or male therapist or if either one is acceptable. Also, try to find a Psychologist within a reasonable distance of where you live or work to cut out the stress of driving long distances to your sessions. In addition, therapy usually is scheduled for at least one time per week, so realistically figure out what you can afford to pay and find out if you have any health benefits that would help cover these services. It is important to first “screen” each Psychologist on the phone before meeting with any of them to determine which one can meet these basic therapy criteria. “Screen” the Psychologists by discussing these points with them, and ask each of them to specify his or her areas of expertise to ascertain if this IS the right person for you or not.

If you feel that a therapist sounds like someone you may want to do therapy with, have at least one session with him or her to more fully experience the Psychologist's demeanor, style, and competence. And, when meeting in person, be aware that there are some SPECIFIC qualities that one can typically detect much better face-to-face rather than over the phone to help one decide if this is the right Psychologist for him or her.

Some of these specific characteristics include the following: the therapist seems warm, accepting, nonjudgmental, and emotionally healthy and secure; the therapist respectfully challenges your incorrect attitudes, feelings, and/or behaviors; the therapist listens and understands you; the therapist is flexible and uses a variety of tools and techniques as needed and as appropriate for your particular issues. Additionally, the therapist needs to maintain clear, appropriate boundaries and be professional and well trained. Also, it can certainly add more warmth and comfortableness to the therapy experience if a Psychologist has an appropriate sense of HUMOR.

After screening the Psychologists by phone and in person, you probably will be able to decide with whom you want to work. Remember: Talking to the RIGHT therapist can help. Ensure that outcome by following these steps, and make the Psychologist-selection process a TREAT instead of a TRICK! Happy Halloween to one and all!

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