

Selecting a Therapist

Adoption is an event that has a life-long effect on everyone involved and brings unique rewards as well as challenges to families. Sometimes families will need or want professional help as concerns or problems common to adoption and/or raising a special needs child arise. Timely intervention by a professional skilled in adoption issues can often prevent issues from becoming serious problems that are more difficult to resolve.

Finding the right therapist can seem like a daunting task, especially when you are feeling overwhelmed or burdened by the difficulties for which you are seeking help. Particularly if it is your first therapy experience, you may feel hesitant or concerned about selecting a therapist. The reality is that we all need help at some point in dealing with life's stresses and a good therapist will help you discover your own strengths, and help you clarify your thoughts and feelings. Trust, respect, understanding and communication are the essential elements of a good client-therapist relationship.

Points to Consider

The most important thing in selecting a therapist is to know why you are choosing one person rather than another, and what you expect to gain from the process. This means knowing something about the therapist's orientation and how it will fit with your desired outcomes.

In your initial contact with a therapist you may wish to ask some questions. The following sections are intended as a guide, and not all may be suitable for your particular situation.

About Credentials

The therapist you choose needs to have credentials and expertise. Some of the commonly used mental health providers are psychiatrists, psychologists, couple and family therapists, social workers and counsellors.

- Ask about what training they have, both formal and informal
- Does the therapist currently participate in related workshops, seminars, or other training programs

- Inquire about how long have they been a therapist
- Are they a legally regulated (registered or licensed) professional?
- Ask whether they belong to any professional organizations or colleges
- How much notice is expected, if you have to change an appointment
- Ask about whether you will be charged for missed appointments
- When and how do you want to be paid for the session(s)?

Fees and Hours

Due to the wide variety of financial arrangements that may be made to cover the cost of therapeutic services, it is important to discuss financial considerations as soon as possible (i.e. your initial contact) with any potential therapist. There may be more possibilities for covering the cost of therapy than you have considered (i.e. extended health benefits, employee assistance plan; assisted adoption support agreements and more). Not only does having a discussion about fees at the outset help identify potential “third parties” who may cover the cost of therapy, it allows you to decide whether or not you can afford this therapist’s fees.

- Ask if there is a charge for the initial consultation session
- Think of the maximum amount that you feel you are able to pay on a per session basis, and ask your therapist whether s/he can see you for that fee.
- Can the fee be reviewed or re-negotiated if your financial situation changes?

Adoption and Special Needs Considerations

In selecting a therapist to work with it is important to consider the value of a therapist who has the specific training you need (i.e. adoption sensitive; knowledgeable with regard to your child’s special needs) as opposed to choosing one simply because s/he is covered by the Medical Services Plan, an employee assistance program or extended health plan.

- Think about what issues you would like to work on
- Ask the therapist whether s/he has had any experience working with these issues
- What continuing clinical training does s/he have on adoption and/or your child’s special needs?
- Ask the therapist how s/he would work with someone with these difficulties (i.e. working with adopted and/or children with special needs and their families)
- Does the therapist have experience or interest in working within an integrated case management model (i.e. collaborating with school personnel,

adoption social worker, youth worker, etc.)

Treatment Methods

Theories of psychotherapy - why people behave and feel the way they do, and how to best help them to bring about desired changes - are far too numerous to be listed here. Among them are family therapy, group therapy (in which members share something in common), play therapy, art therapy, individual or couples counselling and many more. Regardless of the theory or approach that a therapist employs, s/he should be able to explain to you what you can expect from therapy. If you encounter too much jargon or do not understand what the therapist is saying, ask for clarification.

- Ask about the style, technique or approaches s/he uses and how you might benefit from these
- Does the therapist work with the entire family or only the child(ren)?
- Will the therapist give parents regular reports on a child's progress?
- Can the therapist estimate a time frame for the course of therapy?

Your Well-Being and Safety

It is your right as a client to have an ongoing "evaluation" of the therapy. You are entitled

to check with your therapist about the progress and process of the work you and your family are doing. It is also your right to question or refuse to participate in any part of therapy that makes you feel uncomfortable.

You have the right to feel safe during the therapy. If at any time you feel that you have been treated unfairly emotionally, physically, sexually, or financially, you have the right to do something about it. You can refuse treatment that does not feel okay. You have the right to report this. In case records are required, you should start by documenting everything that you have experienced, including your thoughts and feelings about what has happened. You can also call a resource centre (i.e. Crisis Centre) for more information about reporting the abuse and receiving support. They may have the resources to assist you (or refer you to another source) to pursue appropriate action (i.e. report to the police or complain to the therapist's professional governing body).

It is very rare that a client's well-being or safety is compromised in the course of therapy. However, it is important to know that there are options and resources to support you if your personal boundaries are violated.

Your Rights as a Consumer

Therapy should be thought of as a consumer product. You are paying for a service, either

directly, through your tax dollars or your extended health insurance plan. As a wise consumer, you have a right to get high quality, respectful, safe service. You are entitled to shop around, to ask questions for the best service you can get.

As a client you have the right to expect that your therapist will follow certain ethics or rules of conduct. There are certain legal limitations to confidentiality in a therapeutic relationship, depending upon the jurisdiction. Often therapists furnish their clients with a handout explaining the limits of confidentiality. If you do not receive something in writing, you may want to ask for it.

Finally

As you begin your search for a therapist, ask for suggestions from other adoptive parents or SNAP Resource Parents in your area. Also, SNAP's main office maintains a database (Service and Information Database) of a variety of professionals, including therapists, for the province of British Columbia. You can contact them at 1-800-663-7627 or (604) 687-3114.

An effective therapist may be the key to your child's healthy transition to a permanent placement now and his transition to independence later on. The time you take in identifying just the right professional for your child is time well spent.

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