



## How to Choose a Good Therapist

**We are often asked for referrals from all over the United States for therapists who are familiar with our approach. What training should you look for & what questions can you ask to help you find a therapist who will help you grow?**

Try to find referrals from people who have already been helped by the counselor you call. When you make phone contact, **briefly** explain your problem and ask the counselor to give you an overview of how they would approach such an issue. Try and chat on the phone with at least three different counselors. If you are looking on the internet, look for these words when a therapist describes their approach: Specializing in couples and families, attachment, developmental, EMDR training.

**Here are some questions to ask on a phone interview. If a therapist gets defensive as you ask questions, cross them off your list.**

### **How many couples or families are you seeing per week?**

Many therapists primarily see individuals and don't see a lot of couples or families. It's more challenging to have more people in the room. Marriage and family therapy is specialized work that takes additional training. Look for someone who specializes in couples and families and makes this focus a majority of their practice. We believe more change is possible when more people are present in a session.

### **How do you utilize attachment theory in your work with a couple or family?**

We suggest you look for a therapist is trained in attachment theory. A therapist who takes a developmental (historical) approach will help you discover how your own childhood experiences influence how you currently relate as a spouse and parent. Looking through the lens of attachment, a therapist will help a couple discover the roots of their repetitive fight, or frustrating core patterns. These dynamics are created when each spouses' attachment wounds collide in marriage. When you understand history, you will have more compassion for yourself and your spouse. Often your spouse's most irritating behavior is the result of a wound in their childhood. Our attachment injuries also affect how we parent and this is important to understand if we have children.

### **Do you work with a couple together or in separate sessions?**

Milan and I think it is imperative to see a couple together. The therapist will miss the dynamic of how the couple relates to one another when they are seen separately. The core pattern created when two attachment histories collide is observable when the couple is together. While there may be a good reason to have one or two individual sessions, this should be the exception not the norm. Seeing a child with the family will help uncover dynamics that won't be apparent if the child is seen alone.

### **Are you more direct or indirect in your approach to working with couples and families?**

Counselors come in many flavors and schools of thought. Some are indirect, believing the answer is inside you and can be discovered if you have a safe place and a good listener. This approach isn't very effective for families as the strongest member will dominate and try to run the sessions.

Other counselors are more "directive" with the mindset to give guidance, teaching, insight and at times may have an agenda for the session when you come for your appointment. Our most common complaint from people (especially couples) who are unhappy with their counseling is this: "The counselor just sat there and I was never sure where we were going or what was supposed to happen." When it comes to couples therapy we take a very directive approach. If you are shopping for a couple's therapist, in our opinion, a directive approach is beneficial.

### **Try a therapist then evaluate the experience.**

You won't know if a therapist is right for you until you have spent a few sessions together. You both should experience your therapist as competent and fair. After several sessions they should be able to explain their plan of treatment. A good therapist will make it safe to open up and also challenge you to see new perspectives and grow.