

Helping Survivors Find a Reputable Therapist

A Collection of Tips and Resources for Advocates

Jennifer Y. Levy-Peck, PhD & Trisha Smith

Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs

What Advocates Need to Know About Therapy: Working with Children, Adolescents, and Families is a booklet developed by the Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs. The booklet aims to address many of the questions advocates and survivors have about therapy and shares ways that advocacy agencies can develop positive working relationships with therapists so they can make more informed, supportive, and effective referrals.

Available for free download at: <http://www.wcsap.org/what-advocates-need-know-about-therapy-working-children-adolescents-and-families>



Sources for Locating Therapists

- To find a psychologist, you can check the National Register of Health Service Providers in Psychology at www.nationalregister.org. This organization verifies the credentials of providers. The American Psychological Association (<http://apa.org>) has a “Find a Psychologist” feature as well.
- The National Association of Social Workers (www.socialworkers.org), under “Resources,” has a “Find a Clinical Social Worker” link that includes information about several websites that can help you to find an appropriate therapist from a variety of disciplines.
- The American Mental Health Counselors Association (www.amhca.org) provides a link to “Find a Mental Health Counselor.”
- A useful site for finding therapists from various disciplines is the Psychology Today Therapy Directory (www.therapists.psychologytoday.com). This site also includes a separate search for psychiatrists, medical doctors who can prescribe medication if needed, as well as a variety of other mental health professionals. Enter your zip code and you will see profiles of therapists. Therapists have to sign up and pay to be listed, so not all will be on this site. The site does check licenses and credentials before posting information, and it is user-friendly.
- Some people may have access to an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) through their employment or that of their spouse or domestic partner. EAPs typically provide short-term counseling, often without charge, and referrals if longer-term treatment is necessary. The employee’s human resources department will have information about access to EAP plans. Clients should know that EAP counseling is confidential.

Developing and Offering Informed Referrals

- Use the resources listed above, along with your agency's connections, to locate local practitioners. In developing a referral list, it is useful to contact each provider and ask about his or her training and experience in providing therapy to survivors of sexual abuse or assault. You will also want to ask about whether the therapist can provide services in languages other than English, and what forms of payment he or she accepts. This list will only be useful if it is updated on a regular basis (every six months or so).
- Ask your clients whether they have medical insurance, and if so, to call the customer service number of their insurance provider to ask about what mental health services are covered, and which providers are covered. The insurer may also have information about providers' specialties or may have a website with detailed information about providers.
- Learn about your state's provisions for Medicaid-type coverage for individuals without health insurance, including what is covered, how people can apply, and how long it takes to receive coverage. Find out which therapists in your area will accept this payment.
- Investigate your state's crime victim compensation program, if one is available, and obtain or develop clear written information about eligibility, the application process, and mental health coverage.
- Each state has a licensure process for mental health professionals, often through the state board of health. Do a little research to find out what categories of mental health professionals are licensed (for example, states often have a variety of categories for licensed or certified counselors) and find out how to verify whether a mental health professional is licensed. Most states have websites that allow you to search by location or by the name of the professional, and to find out some basic information about licensed individuals.
- Advocates' support will help survivors gain the tools and self-confidence needed to determine whether a particular therapist is a "good fit." Remind your clients that they can ask questions about the clinician's treatment approach and training. The booklet referred to above, *What Advocates Need to Know About Therapy: Working with Children, Adolescents, and Families*, provides more detailed information about how to help clients find the right therapist.

A good metaphor for this is the job of a river fishing guide. The guide takes the clients to the river, helps them bait the hook and cast their line, and makes some suggestions on where to go. This is usually a good tip because she has been down this river before and knows where the hot spots are.

She doesn't catch the fish for her clients, but she knows how to get them to a spot where they are likely to catch one on their own. This is just like the job of the advocate; we are there to really know the good resources and help navigate our clients toward them.