



## Selecting a Mental Health Provider

More Americans are seeking assistance from mental health professionals. Choosing a provider is a very important decision, and several factors—such as the provider's credentials, competence, and your comfort level—are worth considering.

### Types of Mental Health Providers

*Psychiatrists* have medical degrees, can prescribe medication, and have completed three years of residency training beyond medical school in mental health care.

*Psychologists* have a doctorate in psychology and can prescribe medication.

*Professional counselors* have a minimum of a master's degree in a mental health discipline, and at least two years of post-graduate, supervised experience.



## Issue Highlights

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## Understanding Your Employee Assistance Program

**Employers are increasingly aware that their employees' mental and emotional health is as important to their job performance as their physical health. For this reason, many employers now offer employee assistance programs (EAPs) that offer free, confidential, professional counseling services.**

EAPs provide assistance for a variety of problems, including marital or relationship problems, parenting issues, child or elder care concerns, financial worries, mental health issues, and substance abuse problems. These services can typically be accessed by phone or in person. They help to address and solve employees' personal and professional concerns. In addition, employees with concerns inside the workplace, such as job performance or conflict resolution, can contact their EAP representatives for assistance. Supervisors can also notify EAP representatives when they are concerned about an employee's behavior at work.

Some specific circumstances for which an EAP can provide assistance include:

- ✓ Stress
- ✓ Relationship issues
- ✓ Family/parenting issues
- ✓ Domestic violence
- ✓ Divorce/separation
- ✓ Alcohol/substance abuse
- ✓ Single parenting
- ✓ Aging parents
- ✓ Grief/loss issues
- ✓ Depression and anxiety
- ✓ Financial concerns
- ✓ Interpersonal conflicts
- ✓ Workplace adjustment challenges
- ✓ Workplace conflicts
- ✓ Job dissatisfaction and burnout
- ✓ Job performance

For more information about your company's EAP, contact your human resources department. ◇

# Questions to Ask a Prospective Mental Health Provider

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## Types of Mental Health Providers

*Marriage and family therapists* usually have a master's degree or doctorate in marriage and family therapy, and at least one year of supervised practice.

*Social workers* have a minimum of a master's degree in social work and at least two years of post-graduate, supervised practice.

Cost is also an important factor to consider when choosing your mental health provider. You should check with your health plan to see what type of mental health coverage you have; sometimes psychiatrists and psychologists are only partially covered, while a therapist may cost you only a copayment. ♦



- ✓ Are you licensed?
- ✓ What is your training or experience with my problem area?
- ✓ How will you work for my family or me?
- ✓ How will we decide on treatment goals?
- ✓ How often will we meet?
- ✓ What do you expect from me?
- ✓ How will we measure my progress?
- ✓ What are your office hours?
- ✓ How do you handle emergency situations? Can you be reached off-hours?
- ✓ Do you charge for missed appointments?
- ✓ What should I do if I cannot make a previously scheduled appointment?
- ✓ What is your hourly fee?
- ✓ Are you in my health plan provider's network?

**As the demand increases for mental health providers, the number of these professionals available to the public also rises. With an increasing number of options available, it is important to be sure that the mental health provider you choose is the best possible fit for you.**

Prior to making a decision, research the different types of mental health professionals that are available to you (see sidebar), and make appointments to meet any provider you think will fit your needs. It is extremely important to interview potential providers, as this person must be someone you feel comfortable talking with on a regular basis. Prepare a list of questions that will help you determine if this provider is right for you. Some questions you should ask include:

- ✓ What types of treatment do you provide?

Asking the right questions—and enough of them—will lead you to make the decision that is best for you. ♦

