

FINDING A COUNSELOR

Most people see a counselor after they have tried to fix or figure out their situation for a long time but still can't seem to come up with an answer. The, "Can't see the forest for the trees." metaphor applies here. If you are too close to a problem it's hard to see the solution.

A good counselor can help you to find solutions to problems, can help with the motivation to work on a problem and can provide you an opportunity to just talk things out. Counselors usually recommend books to read, groups to visit and things to think about.

What's the difference between counselors?

Research shows that progress in counseling depends mostly upon the level of connection between the counselor and the client. More important than the counselor's degree, the theories behind the counseling or number of sessions, a sense of connection and a sense of being understood is the most important element.

With this in mind here are some common categories of counselors:

- Psychiatrist/MD – A psychiatrist is a doctor who has training in brain chemistry and in prescribing medications for emotional and mental conditions. Some psychiatrists provide counseling but most only evaluate and prescribe. A good psychiatrist can be a life saver. In less complicated cases family physicians are willing to prescribe antidepressants or mood stabilizers.
- Psychologist/PhD – Psychologists are usually trained in the testing aspects of mental functioning as well as in counseling. Their focus is on the individual, how one develops and responds to situations in their environment. Psychologists go to school for four or more years after college to get a doctorate degree.
- There are several types of counselors who hold masters degrees, two years of training after college. Some examples are:
 - Licensed Professional Counselor or LPC – The focus is on the individual
 - Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist or LMFT – The focus is on family relationships.
 - Licensed Clinical Social Worker or LCSW – The focus is on the big picture including the individual and the environment.
 - Certified Addictions Counselor or CAC – The focus is on helping people deal with drugs alcohol or any other type of addiction.

There are many other types of counselors depending on the state that you live in. A counselor with any of the above degrees can effectively help you with your marriage, parenting, personal growth or addiction. The key is finding a counselor with expertise and the potential for a connection with you.

Counselors specialize in certain areas: Some work with children, some with individuals, some with couples, and some specialize in addictions. The personality of the counselor is another important consideration. Some counselors talk a lot, some talk a little, some are directive and some are easy going. Take your time and talk to two or three counselors before deciding on who best to work with. It's always OK to change counselors.