

The Most Important Qualities to Look for in a Therapist

Choosing a therapist is a daunting task. You are looking for a total stranger to whom you may divulge some of your deepest secrets. So, it's important to know the most important factor in selecting a therapist, which should help you take the next step.

Information to Consider

Before we discuss the factor that has been found to have the highest correlation with therapeutic success, it is important to make sure that therapists who you are considering are legally qualified to provide therapy.

There are people who may not actually be qualified to practice, and while some may even be helpful, many may not truly have the necessary experience. To be certain that your therapist is qualified; make sure that they have a license to practice in their field, whether they are a psychologist, social worker, counselor, or any other type of therapist. The exception here is if you are working with a therapist in training, who should be working under the supervision of a licensed professional. A therapist in training who does not have all of the qualifications yet can still be extremely helpful and is worth considering, especially if you are experiencing financial hardship and need a lower fee.

What Matters Most in a Therapist

The most important thing to look for in a therapist is probably not what you think. It is not years of training or even the type of therapy that the person offers.

It is actually something that is harder to measure, and in fact, you are the only person who knows what it is. Stated simply, the most important thing to look for in a therapist is the quality of the relationship that you have with them, otherwise known as the "therapeutic alliance." You can judge this by how comfortable you feel with the person.

There is a body of research that exists known as "therapeutic outcome research," which helps you identify this comfort level. Folks who do therapeutic outcome research look for factors that constitute positive change in therapy. This research has found that most of the change that happens in therapy actually has to do with factors unrelated to therapy. Falling in love, for example, can usually bring positive change in someone's life, and this is an event that typically

occurs outside of therapy.. As much as 40 percent of change in therapy has been found to be due to factors outside of the therapeutic process itself.

Factors Involved With Positive Change in Therapy

If 40 percent of therapeutic change has to do with factors outside of therapy, you may be wondering what happens within therapy that produces successful results. The most significant factor contributing to positive results in therapy has been found to be the aforementioned good relationship between therapist and client.

Fifteen percent of change has been found to do with the therapist's techniques, and 15 percent of change was found to be related to the client's expectation of how much therapy could help. The remaining 30 percent was found to be the strength of the relationship between the therapist and client.

So, How Do You Choose a Therapist?

The simplest answer here is to find someone with whom you feel comfortable. Therapists are not car mechanics, and you are not a car. Therapy is a uniquely human process. You are the best judge to find the right therapist for you. Be picky. That being said, you may feel uncomfortable with everyone the first time you see them since an initial visit with a therapist can be anxiety-provoking. Give someone a few sessions to see how you feel, unless you know in your gut it is a "no." Only start to question yourself if every therapist across the board makes you feel uncomfortable, then find the person with whom you feel the most comfortable, even if it is still hard to connect. Your therapist is there to talk to about this process.

Therapy can be intense, rewarding and life-changing, but you need the right therapist on board.

Source:

Lambert M. Psychotherapy outcome research: Implications for integrative and eclectic therapists. In J.C.Norcross & M. R. Goldfried (Eds.), *Handbook of psychotherapy integration*. 1992; (pp. 94-129). NY: Basic Books.