

# Ask a Therapist

## So you need a professional counselor? A therapist? A psychologist?

Under some circumstances, you may not be able to use a counselor of your own faith. The following questions will assist in determining if you will feel comfortable working with a particular counselor.

### Getting Started

Here are some basic questions to ask the organization, the agency, and the counselor.

Be bold in asking! If you do not feel comfortable asking, take a friend along as your spokesperson. A counselor who is confident in his/her counseling will be pleased and impressed that questions are being asked. You should receive this information at no cost even though it takes some of the counselor's time.

1. What is your training to be a counselor?  
Education? Degrees? Areas of expertise or specialization? Licensed or certified in your state?

*You want a counselor with at least a master's degree and certified or licensed in your state as a professional counselor, marriage and family counselor, social worker, or psychologist.*

2. How long have you been doing therapy?

*You want someone who has been doing therapy for at least two years.*

3. What is your main theoretical approach to counseling?

*Look for approaches where the counselor assists you to understand your thoughts and beliefs and how they impact your feelings and your relationships. You will be taught new and healthy ways of perceiving and dealing with the issues and problems. Ask the counselor to explain what you don't understand. If the counselor says that his/her primary approach is Freudian/psychoanalytical or Rogerian, thank the counselor for his/her time and look elsewhere.*

4. Write out two or three sentences describing the concern(s) or problem(s) that you would like help with. Do not write down a long history—the counselor will ask for information as needed. Read your sentences to the counselor and ask the following question: How frequently have you helped people with this kind of problem(s)?

*Never or seldom is not the right answer! You are looking for "frequently".*

5. If you are seeking marriage counseling, ask the counselor for his/her personal experience with marriage. Also ask the counselor about his/her view of marriage and divorce.

*This should give you a sense of the counselor's life experiences in marriage. You will also gain insight into the counselor's view of commitment in marriage.*

6. If you are seeking help for dealing with your child or adolescent, ask the counselor to describe his/her experience in working with children.

*As with the previous question, the counselor's response will give you an idea if the counselor has had life experiences, in this case, in parenting.*

## **Cherish and Guard Your Faith**

As members of WELS/ELS congregations we believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God. We believe in creation and the Triune God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. We believe that we are sinful and that Jesus died on the cross for our sins and rose again to gain for us eternal life with him in heaven. As a result of sin, we will experience problems here on earth in our lives and in our relationships with others.

Because you want the counselor to, at the minimum, accept your faith and not try to change it, ask the following questions:

1. Do you believe in God? If so, what do you believe?

*Look for simple answers about creation, sin, Jesus dying for us, heaven. If you don't get them, ask.*

2. Do you believe that the Bible is God's Word and provides the spiritual answers we need in this life?

*A simple "yes" to this question suffices. Any qualifiers to the yes should raise possible concerns.*

3. Would you be willing to work and consult with my pastor regarding my problems?

*Again, you are looking for a "yes". This answer suggests a real desire and openness on the part of the counselor to respect your faith and use community resources to assist in dealing with the problems. Note: If the counselor is of*



*another faith or is not a Christian but is willing to respect your faith and have your pastor involved in the counseling process, you can still proceed with counseling if you are comfortable with the counselor's responses to all the other questions.*

## **Costs**

What are the costs for counseling? Will my insurance cover part or all of the costs? If insurance will not cover all of the costs do you have a sliding scale fee or ability to pay fee? By asking these questions at the initial contact you will have a clear idea of your responsibility for payment of the services you receive from the counselor.

## **Above All**

Respect your first impression! If, for any reason, you feel uncomfortable with the counselor, look for another. Don't feel bad or apologetic about doing so! This is your life we are talking about.

To learn more, go to [wels.net/mental-health](http://wels.net/mental-health).

See other flyers in this series at [csm.welsrc.net/download-csm/mental-health-needs/](http://csm.welsrc.net/download-csm/mental-health-needs/).

- ▶ Models of Therapy
- ▶ Christian or Non-Christian Counselor
- ▶ When to Refer

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## **WELS Committee on Mental Health Needs**

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