



Choosing and Working with a Professional Therapist

Some people are fortunate enough, through private resources or through their health coverage, to have the opportunity to have an extended relationship with a professional therapist. A competent and caring professional can bring a wealth of knowledge, experience, and creative technique to bear on assisting you with your personal difficulties. In times of severe emotional crisis or breakdown, a good therapist can be indispensable.

Choosing a therapist involves making judgments similar to those involved in selecting a physician. You need to find someone whose expertise you have confidence in and whose personal style works for you. Like physicians, therapists vary widely in their willingness to put your empowerment at the center of the healing process. Keep looking until you find a therapist who is willing to think *with* you rather than tell you what to think, and who is open to learning about the inherent releases and other healing principles from the Peak Living Network.

Here are some key characteristics to seek in a therapist:

*** Someone who respects you.**

Avoid a therapist who seems to feel superior, for example one who assumes that his or her insights about you are more accurate or valuable than your knowledge about yourself. When the therapist disagrees with you about something, his or her tone should sound humble and kind, rather than arrogant or condescending.

*** Someone who is warm with you, whose caring you can feel.**

Therapy is not a technical process. Yes, a therapist's skills are important, but they can't substitute for the human qualities of warmth, humor, and ability to connect. Choose a therapist whom you will look forward to spending time with. Over time you should come to feel that your therapist loves you; otherwise the work you'll accomplish with him or her will remain quite limited.



*** Someone who values and recognizes your strengths.**

There is so much that you've done well in the past, and that you continue to do well today, whether or not you feel like that's true. A therapist may sometimes need to push you to examine issues that you're avoiding, but that should not be the overall tone of the therapy. Frequent attention should be paid to your triumphs and abilities.

*** Someone who respects the importance of having you in charge of your own healing process.**

Be wary of a therapist who analyzes you whenever you don't want to do what he or she recommends, perhaps calling your reluctance "denial" or "resistance". Your therapist should value your sense of what will work and what won't. (And if you decide to quit working with a particular therapist, *do not* be swayed if the therapist starts to analyze or pathologize your reasons for wanting to quit. Trust your own decision-making process.)

*** Someone who respects the innate healing releases.**

Many therapists have been trained to see the key discharge processes as trivial or even as unhealthful. For example, some view crying as "just a stage" that needs to be gotten past, or view anger as a sign of failure to accept reality.

*** Someone who has a plan.**

You are the ultimate authority in a therapeutic relationship — the therapist works for you, not the other way around — but at the same time the therapist should have a direction in mind. He or she should work with you collaboratively to make a plan of action for your healing. That plan should include steps you will take in your life, not just emotional work you will do in your sessions.



You may find it challenging to find a therapist who works in the above ways — or to re-train your current therapist if you already have one — but you can do it. An increasing number of therapists are undertaking mental health work that recognizes our inner drive toward wellness, that sees our strengths, and that remembers that we live in our bodies, not apart from them. Consider alternative approaches such as expressive therapy (art, dance, music, and theater therapies, for example); body therapy; and wilderness therapy; to name just a few. (These are all established, respected approaches to emotional healing with a professional.)

If you live in a very rural area or just can't find progressive therapists where you live, consider working with a remote therapist by phone or computer.

Finally, I encourage you to give a copy of *The Joyous Recovery* to your therapist, and ask him or her to work with you in a way that follows the book's principles (but on a one-way basis; don't ask your therapist to co-counsel with you, because that wouldn't be appropriate for a professional therapist to do). For example, you could do all of the exercises for *The Joyous Recovery* with the help of a therapist, instead of doing them with a co-counseling partner or on your own.