



CENTRAL WASHINGTON PSYCHOTHERAPY ASSOCIATES
1700 17TH STREET, N.W. SUITE 203 WASHINGTON DC 20009

PSYCHOTHERAPY
AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

ROBERT SHEAVLY, LICSW, DCSW

How to Choose a Psychotherapist

Therapy is a large commitment of time, money and energy and so you should choose your therapist carefully. How can you tell if the therapist you are considering is excellent, average or virtually ineffective? Since therapy is collaborative process, I strongly believe you should be comfortable, encouraged and optimistic with the therapist you choose. As a therapist with over 25 years experience in helping others grow and change, here are some of the criteria I'd recommend considering.

Licensing, Credentialing and Specializations

Licensing is required by local or state governments in order for a professional to practice legally within their jurisdiction. Typically, licensure ensures the minimum qualifications necessary to practice, including education, supervised experience and length of time in practice. Some jurisdictions (e.g. the District of Columbia) provide different licenses to indicate levels of experience or competency. Professional organizations provide credentials based on a therapist's experience, training, and areas of advanced specialization. Ask the therapist you are considering about their licensing, advanced credentials and certifications in any specialty areas of concern to you.

Post Graduate Professional Training

A therapist who has recently completed their graduate training cannot be expected to have the same skills as one who has honed their clinical abilities under the tutelage of master therapists. Ask the therapist you are considering about their post graduate training. Great therapists are devoted to life long learning. The more they have the better they are likely to be.

Their Own Therapy

The primary instrument that any therapist uses is their own personality. While knowledge can be obtained through academic study, a health personality--one capable of fostering growth and change in others--is a result of years of self-study, introspection and just plain hard work. Academic training does not provide the growth necessary for self-knowledge and a health personality. Psychotherapy does. Ask about their own experience with therapy. Make sure the psychotherapist you are considering has done their own work before they work with you.

Gut Feelings

The ability of a therapist to be empathic and a feeling of rapport between the therapist and client are essential for successful therapy. Assess your initial contacts with the therapist:

Did you feel comfortable with the therapist?

Did he or she listen?

Is this someone you feel that you will be able to trust?

Did you have a good "gut feeling" about the therapist? Was the chemistry right?

In summary, by considering both the therapist's objective qualifications and your own subjective experience, you will have good sense if the therapist is right for you.