



Toolkit for Parenting Teenagers
Tip Sheet #9: Finding a Family Counselor

Whether you're considering counseling for specific family members or for the whole family, finding the right family counselor can be an overwhelming process. Counseling can be very effective in helping families identify their strengths, resolve conflicts to challenging problems, and manage stressful life transitions. Counselors who work with families should be skilled at understanding family dynamics and creating a safe space where needs and concerns can be discussed. To help you decide on a counselor for your family, ask the professionals you are considering the following questions:

1. **What training and experience do you have related to family counseling?** The counselor should have specific training in theories and approaches for working with families, since this is a unique specialty area in the counseling profession. Ideally, you can find a counselor who has worked extensively with families, or a newer counselor who is being supervised by a more experienced family counselor.
2. **What is your approach to counseling families?** There are several different approaches to family counseling. Your counselor should be able to explain their theoretical approach to you in a language you can understand, without using complex, abstract theoretical terms.
3. **How many sessions will there be?** Your counselor may have a time frame in which they like to work with families. However, your needs and schedule may necessitate a shorter or longer program. It may not be possible to determine an exact time-line at the start of counseling, but once your counselor has a general sense of your family's goals for counseling, they should be able to offer a general time-line so you'll understand what time commitment will be involved.
4. **What is the cost?** The cost of family counseling and counseling in general can vary widely. You will need to check with your health insurance company to see if family counseling is a covered service. Many times, having insurance pay for family counseling will require one family member to be identified as the main client. It is important to discuss costs with your counselor up front so you can make an informed decision about how much you are able to afford. If you can't afford a counselor's services, ask if they can provide you with referrals to more affordable services in the community.
5. **Do you have experience working with families facing our unique situation?** If you are seeking counseling for a specific challenge in your familial relationships, it can be helpful to understand whether the counselor has experience specifically addressing those challenges. Certain family situations--such as a separation, divorce, or blended families--can benefit from working with a professional who is specially trained to address those issues.
6. **Who will be included in the treatment process?** Because there are several different approaches to family counseling, not all family members may attend every session. It is important to inquire about who the counselor believes needs to be present for sessions and if the counselor will be reaching out to others who may provide added insight into the situation, like extended family members, teachers, school counselors, and pediatricians.

In addition to the questions above, it's also important to consider how well you and your family "click" with the counselor. It's important to be comfortable with the counselor you've chosen. The more positive everyone feels about the counselor, the safer everyone will feel in exploring challenging issues in your relationships.