

Choosing a therapist.

On meeting a therapist for the first time, trust your feelings. It's easy to assume that the therapist has all the power; the one who is right; the one who knows it all – the healthy one. There can be a temptation to believe that, if it doesn't feel right, or if you don't feel comfortable and safe, then it's your fault.

But therapists are first and foremost people. Years in therapy help them become aware of themselves, but it doesn't make them problem free or perfect. If it feels wrong, find another therapist. A good relationship with the therapist is key.

In the section of this website entitled [Getting Started and Fees](#), I write that *“Therapy is based on relationship... so it's important you choose the right person – that means right for you.”* Research has shown that how well you get on with your therapist is as important to the outcome as the therapy itself. So take into consideration who the therapist is as much as what they do. As Phillip Hodson of BACP (British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy) says, *“The most important factor in determining whether your therapy is successful is your relationship with the therapist.”*

Therapists sometimes offer an initial consultation to allow client and therapist to get a sense of one another. It can be a bit like viewing a house for the first time. Many of us decide whether it 'feels' right quite quickly – and if it feels wrong. More detailed assessments follow of course, but that initial gut reaction can be very important. It's about both heart and head. As Phillip Hodson says, *“...you can treat the initial assessment like an audition...it's a good sign if you get a gut feeling the therapist knows what they're doing and you're able to talk openly with them. But if you don't get this feeling then I'd advise you not to continue.”*

He also gives a useful checklist you might want to use. For example, do you like their manner towards you? Do you trust them? Do you feel safe with them? Do you feel they want what's best for you?

Then there are the practicalities to consider. Therapy is a regular, ongoing commitment, so try and choose a therapist in a location and at a time as convenient as possible. Ask the therapist lots of questions about the agreement between you. For example, do they charge for missed sessions or for times when you are on holiday? Most therapists see a commitment to therapy as renting a space in their schedule that is yours for as long as you want it. You may not always want the space, but as it's yours and can't be offered to anyone else, it can still attract a fee.

And what about gender? You may feel nervous discussing intimate issues with a therapist of the opposite sex; alternatively, if you are aware of having problems relating to the opposite sex, then talking safely with a therapist of the opposing gender might be the perfect *'laboratory condition'* in which to do some exploration.