My doctor recommended therapy. Now what?

There are many types of therapy/counseling. You should discuss with your doctor what type of therapy is being recommended and the primary goals of the therapy referral. This handout describes common types of therapy and how to find a therapist to help you get started.

What types of therapy are frequently recommended?

**Psychotherapy**
Psychotherapy or talk therapy is provided by many different types of professionals including psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed social workers, licensed professional counselors and licensed marriage and family therapists. Psychotherapy focuses on learning about your condition and your moods, feelings, thoughts and behaviors. Psychotherapy helps you learn how to respond to challenging situations with healthy coping skills.

**Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT)**
CBT is generally a short-term therapy that research has shown can be effective in treatment of anxiety, depression, phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder and chronic pain. It focuses on identifying inaccurate or negative thinking that influences behavior and learning and practicing new skills that will assist in changing the concerning behavior. The therapist will often prescribe homework to practice skills learned in session.

**Play therapy**
Play therapy is a form of therapy primarily geared toward children. Play therapists use various media, including storytelling, puppet play, drama, music, dance, sand play, painting and drawing and board games to help children express their emotions, improve communication and work together to solve problems.

**Parent guidance/coaching**
Parent guidance therapy assists parents in better understanding their child’s difficulties (e.g., diagnoses, behaviors) and guides parents on how to better manage their child’s negative or problem behaviors and strengthen parent-child relationships.

**Parent-Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT)**
PCIT is a combination of play therapy and behavioral therapy for young children and their parents or caregivers. This intervention is focused on coaching caregivers by teaching specific skills to improve physical and verbal exchanges with their children.
How do I find a therapist?

There are many ways to find a therapist for you or your child:

- Call your insurance company and ask for a list of in-network providers.
- Visit Psychology Today’s website (www.psychologytoday.com). You can refine your search by selecting your state, county or town, insurance, age, issue (e.g. autism, Asperger’s, developmental disability) and type of therapy.
- William James College INTERFACE Referral Services is a free, confidential referral service for individuals in participating communities. Check the following website: https://interface.williamjames.edu/ or call 617-332-3666 or 888-244-6843
- Contact your local autism support center or www.aane.org to request a list of providers: www.mass.gov/autism-support-centers.
- Search on the Exceptional Lives website: https://exceptionallives.org/ma/.
- Use the Social Work Therapy Matcher Service: Call 800-242-9794 or look on the website: www.naswma.org/page/therapymatcher
- Ask friends or parent networks (i.e., local SEAPACs) for recommendations.
- Ask your child’s primary care doctor for recommendations.

Once you identify potential therapists, ask important questions to see if the therapist is a good fit:

- What type of insurance do you accept? What are the fees?
- What is your appointment availability (e.g., after school, weekends, weekly)?
- Are you providing virtual appointments? Will you be resuming in person?
- What are your areas of expertise (e.g., working with children, adults, anxiety, ASD, intellectual disability (ID), developmental delay)?
- What kind of treatments do you use (e.g., CBT, play therapy, mindfulness)?
- Are you open to collaborating with other team members (e.g., school, psychiatrist, group home, parents)? How do you typically collaborate with a treatment team?

How do I know if therapy is working?

Part of what makes success in therapy so difficult to measure is the fact that success means different things to different providers, in different kinds of therapy, and for different diseases or purposes.

Ask yourself these questions:

- Do you look forward to your therapy appointments?
- Are you applying the therapist’s suggestions outside the session?
- How are the suggestions working? Is day-to-day behavior changing?
- Do you have greater insight about the original concerns or what is happening day to day?
- Do you notice improved progress toward your goals?
Websites/fact sheets


Books

- *CBT for Children and Adolescents with High-Functioning Autism Spectrum Disorders* by Angela Scarpa, Susan White and Tony Attwood
- *Cognitive Behavioral Therapy for Adults with Autism Spectrum Disorder, Second Edition* by Valerie Gaus