

### General Guidelines for The Initial Consultation

It is advised that you take advantage of the free consultation that many counselors offer. Generally, you can see for yourself

- whether you feel you can trust the counselor
- whether you feel comfortable around the counselor
- whether you feel the counselor points out a direction or two that you find yourself interested in exploring more after this initial consultation
- whether you feel the counselor is not only knowledgeable but also passionate about helping with your issues

An effective therapist is someone who has a balanced combination between experiences and openness. You would not want a provider who claims to be able to address most issues, if not all. In other words, you would want a specialist as opposed to a generalist. At the same time, you would not want a provider who exclusively specialized in a particular problem to avoid the specialist's tendency of looking at an issue from a closed mindset. Remember Maslow's hammer: **"if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail."**

### Why Do We Need This Initial Consultation?

The vast majority of counselors offer a free initial consultation, mostly through a phone conversation. So it is pretty informal. It usually takes between 15 and 30 minutes. There are also counselors who offer initial consultation in person. Everything you reveal to the counselor during this initial consultation would remain confidential unless there is a safety issue involved. Keep in mind, though, you should not expect any therapy to be done in this initial consultation.

This initial consultation allows both the client and the counselor to see if they would make a good team working together. Determining factors include

- Whether the counselor can competently treat the presenting issues (professional level)
- Whether the counselor and the client are compatible in personal style (interpersonal level)

### Examples of Questions to Ask During The Initial Consultation

So the initial consultation functions as an interview of the counselor from the client's stance. Thus, when you call a counselor for initial consultation, you need to ask questions, including:

- Do you specialize in treating my problem?
- What makes you specialized in treating my problem?
- Have you worked with similar issues before?
- Why should I come to you rather than other type of provider for my problem?
- Why should I come to you rather other counselors who also specialize in my problem?
- What is the typical outcome of those cases?
- What type of treatment intervention will you use?
- What makes this treatment intervention particularly effective with my problem?
- How does my past history impact my current problem?
- How can I tell if therapy is working?
- What is your style as a counselor?

### Examples of Questions to Ask During The Initial Consultation

- How did you decide to become a counselor?
- How long have you been practicing?
- What's your previous working experience or internship experience? Or previous training?
- How often do we meet?
- How much is your session fee?
- Do you take any insurance?
- Why don't you accept insurance?
- What's the pros and cons of in-network and out-of-network providers?
- Do you have any religion?
- What is your sexual orientation?
- What is your cultural background?
- What is the typical length of treatment?
- Is everything confidential?
- What is the pros and cons of therapy?
- Do you offer different treatment modalities other than the traditional talk therapy?
- Can you tell me a bit more about treatment modalities such as hypnotherapy, cranio-sacral therapy (CST), eye-movement desensitization and Reproecssing (EMDR) and how are they different from the traditional talk therapy?
- Do you give in-between session homework?
- What else can I do to maximize the benefits of the counseling?
- What do you think will make us a good match?
- Are there any type of clients you do not work with?
- Have you have any personal experiences with my problem?
- What's your degree and major?
- Do you speak any other language?
- Are you familiar with psychiatric medications? Do you prescribe them?
- How will counseling look like with us sharing different cultural backgrounds?
- What's your view on racism?
- How will I know if you really understand my problem?
- What's your initial impression of my issue?
- What makes you an effective therapist?
- Can you share one of your success stories?
- Who is your typical type of client?
- Do you practice what you suggest to your client in your personal life?
- What is your biggest strength and setback as a counselor yourself?
- Do you have any children?
- If you are not a counselor, what would you be doing?