

# How to Choose a Mental Health Provider for Your Family



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**Congratulations! You took the first step!**

# Why is choosing so challenging?

- There are a LOT of variables:
  - Your personality and what you're comfortable with
  - The provider's personality
  - Availability
  - What your insurance covers
  - The provider's philosophy and modality

# Four Steps to Guide You

1

Identify Your  
Role & Goals

2

Identify  
Patient  
Preferences

3

Compare  
with Provider  
Specialties

4

Understand  
Treatment  
Options

# Step 1: Identify Your Role & Goals

## The ROLE

### Who will meet with the provider?

- You only?
- Your child only?
- You and your child together?
- The whole family?

### Why is this important?

Knowing who will meet with the provider will help you to identify what kind of services you need.

For example, if you want to meet with the provider without your child, you may be looking for parent coaching services.

# Step 1: Identify Your Role & Goals (cont.)

## The GOAL

### What do you hope to accomplish?

- Evaluation/diagnosis?
- Counseling/coaching?
- Talking about/interpreting feelings?
- Developing/implementing action plans?
- Prescribing/monitoring medication?
- Guiding holistic/homeopathic/spiritual interventions?

### Why is this important?

Research tells us that setting goals for mental health services results in less uncertainty for patients and helps providers develop more effective treatment plans.

Your provider will help you set specific targets to reach your goals.

# Step 2: Identify Patient Preferences

- In the previous step, you decided who will be meeting with the mental health provider.
- For this step, think about that person's needs and wants.

If your CHILD is meeting  
with the provider...



Patient preferences  
should come from your  
child.

TIP: It's OK if some preferences come from the parent/caregiver (for example, drive time might be a factor for you since you're doing the driving). But try to focus on the patient's needs first!

# Step 2: Identify Patient Preferences (cont.)

## Characteristics

- Gender
- Language
- Faith
- Race/Ethnicity

## Accessibility

- Travel Distance
- Hours/Availability
- Setting
- Insurance

## Expertise

- License
- Specialty
- Special Interests
- Practice Makeup



# Step 3: Compare Provider Specialties

## Some of the most common specialties:

- Behavior Professionals (BCBA, RBT, Behavioral Therapists)
- Early Intervention Specialist
- Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT or LIMFT)
- Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC, LPCC, LPCC-S)
- Licensed Social Worker (LSW, LISW, LISW-S, LCSW)
- Psychiatrist (including Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist)
- Psychologist (Ph.D., Psy.D.)

## Ask Yourself:

What kind of provider does my family need?

Does the provider I'm considering have the right skills?

Is there a lower-cost or a higher-availability provider that could also fill our needs?

# Step 4: Understand Treatment Formats

## Therapy happens in different formats:

- Individual Therapy
- Couples Therapy
- Family Therapy
- Group Therapy

### Ask Yourself:

How do my goals match up with the formats?

What format am I most comfortable with?

# Step 4: Understand Treatment Types

## Some of the most common treatments:

- Behavioral Therapy (ABA, CBT, DBT, etc.)
- Cognitive Therapies (CBT, DBT, ACT, etc.)
- Collaborative Problem Solving (CPS)
- Psychodynamic Therapy

## Therapists may also use skills in:

- Trauma-Informed Care
- Play Therapy

## Ask Yourself:

What kind of treatment am I most comfortable with?

Does the provider I'm considering offer the treatments I think will work best for my family?

# Behavioral Therapies

- Science-based
  - Uses measurement to define observable behaviors
  - Applies controlled interventions to change behaviors
  - Tracks progress with data
- Examples of Behavioral Therapies
  - Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA)
  - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) /Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)
  - Exposure Therapy

## Some Uses:

Anxiety  
Challenging Behavior  
Depression  
Eating Disorders  
Gaining Skills  
Obsessions/Compulsions  
Phobias  
Social Skills

# Cognitive Therapies

- Thought-based
  - Our thoughts drive emotional and behavioral responses
  - Changing our thoughts can improve the way we experience problems
  - Requires abstract thinking
- Examples of Cognitive Therapies
  - Acceptance & Commitment Therapy (ACT)
  - Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) /Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT)
  - Exposure Therapy

## Some Uses:

Anger  
Anxiety  
Depression  
Eating Disorders  
Obsessions/Compulsions  
Panic/Phobias  
Personality Disorders  
Self-Esteem  
Stress Management

# Collaborative & Proactive Solutions

- Family-oriented
  - Families assume that “kids do well if they can”
  - Goal is to support children whose lagging skills prevent adaptive choices
- Three-step Process
  - Empathy (understanding the child’s concerns)
  - Adult Concerns
  - Invitation and problem-solving
- Focus is on collaboration

## **Some Uses:**

Challenging Behavior  
Family Connection  
Gaining Skills  
Problem-Solving

# Psychodynamic Therapy

- Focus on conscious vs unconscious thought
  - Uses reflections from past to understand current thoughts/beliefs/emotions
  - Therapist and client develop a relationship that mirrors other relations in client's life
  - Requires abstract thinking
- Psychoanalytic Therapy
  - Similar, but tends to be more intensive and focused on understanding the problem (as opposed to outcomes and solutions)

## **Some Uses:**

Bipolar Disorder  
Depression  
Eating Disorders  
Personality Disorders  
Relationships  
Social Anxiety

# Skills

## Trauma-Informed Therapies

- Centers a person's trauma history ("what happened to you?" as opposed to "what's wrong with you?")
- Focus on safety, collaboration, and transparency

## Play-Based Therapies

- Uses play to help therapists understand children's problems.
- Play may also be used to teach new skills or ways of looking at problems

Both skills may be part of separate certifications, but many therapists layer them into the therapies discussed today too. For example, Trauma-Focused CBT is a cognitive behavioral approach that helps children who have experienced trauma.





# Questions?

Check out [connectingforkids.org/Mental-Health-Providers](https://connectingforkids.org/Mental-Health-Providers) for a detailed guide!