

Choosing a Mental Health Provider

Some victims/survivors have found it helpful to seek counseling services from a mental health provider, psychologist, psychiatrist, or other counseling professional. A counselor can be a valuable part of your support system. They can provide clarity, insight, information, and consistent support as you move through the journey of healing.

A mental health provider should:

- Believe what you tell her or him
- Fully respect your feelings and experiences
- Keep the focus on you
- Encourage you to develop a support system outside of therapy
- Help enhance your self-care skills
- Be open to feedback and be willing to discuss problems that may occur in the therapy relationship
- Ensure your confidentiality

A mental health provider should NOT:

- Have a friendship with you outside of counseling
- Make light of your feelings or experiences
- Talk about his or her personal problems
- Want a sexual relationship with you now or in the future
- Force you to do anything that you do not want to do
- Push reconciliation or forgiveness

A mental health provider is someone employed and chosen by you. You have the right to information about their beliefs, methods and areas of expertise. You have the right to end a counseling relationship if you are not comfortable with your mental health provider, if you do not feel safe, or for any other reason.

If you are searching for a mental health provider now, it is okay to interview several before making your choice. The mental health provider must be licensed or certified in the state that they practice, or registered on the Vermont roster of non-licensed and non-certified psychotherapists in order for the Compensation Program to consider payment to the provider that you choose. If a provider's license is conditioned, the Program may not be able to pay the provider for their

services. If a provider's license is inactive or revoked the Program will not pay the provider for services rendered during that time period.

Here are some questions that you might find useful in interviewing potential mental health providers. You may have other questions depending on your own needs or belief system.

- How long have you been practicing and what kind of degree do you have?
- What is your approach to therapy? (He/she should be able to explain this to you in easy to understand terms.)
- Do you have an area of specialization?
- Can you be reached during an emergency? How can I reach you if I have an emergency?
- Do you schedule emergency sessions?
- What training do you have in the area of working with victim/survivors of (type of crime that occurred to you)?
- What do you believe is the role of a mental health provider in helping someone who is dealing with (type of crime that occurred to you)?

After you have spoken to the mental health provider, you may want to ask yourself a few questions.

- What feelings did I notice when I was talking to him/her?
- Did I feel respected and listened to?
- What did I like about talking to him/her?
- What did I dislike about talking to her/him?

Portions of this were adapted from The Courage to Heal Workbook, by Laura Davis. The workbook includes a helpful chapter on finding a counselor. Another book with helpful information on finding a counselor is Getting Free: You Can End Abuse and Take Back Your Life by Ginny NiCarthy. 8/6/08;