

## How do I find a therapist?

Finding a good therapist is always a challenge, and there is no magic referral list – even if someone knows a good practitioner, that person still might not “click” with you or your child. It’s really helpful if you can take some time first to reflect about what you want to accomplish in therapy, and what kind of therapist you think would be good – perhaps develop a list of 3-5 qualities that seem important to you. Include your child in this process. For a good discussion of what to look for, watch this: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M\\_2RwDZac2o](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M_2RwDZac2o)

Depending on your insurance, the insurance company’s website might have a referral section listing mental health providers. Another very good option is to look on sites such as [www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com) or [www.sscit.org](http://www.sscit.org), both of which have very useful search engines – you can narrow by location, insurance, age of the client, etc. They also encourage their providers to write a description of their therapeutic approach. You should take the time to read through these descriptions to pick those who sound appealing to your personal style.

Ideally you should pick at least 5 potential therapists, since once you start calling them, many may not be taking new clients or have a compatible schedule. This is a difficult process, so be patient. If someone has a wait list, always sign up for it while you keep looking – if you find someone sooner, you can always cancel the waitlist. You can also ask to be added to their cancellation list and possibly get in sooner.

Once you start seeing the therapist, you should take about three sessions to decide if they are a good fit in person – don’t go by first impressions, but don’t keep going for months if there’s no good connection. Do not assume that it was a waste of time if it doesn’t work out – you will have learned more about what you want and need in a therapist, which will help you find a better fit as you continue looking. Do keep looking! You wouldn’t give up on wearing clothes if the first few pants you tried on didn’t fit (nor would you keep wearing things that don’t fit).

It is important to also focus on your child’s comfort level with the clinician, as they are the one actually working with this person. If the child does not like the counselor, accept this and go back to your list to try another one. Make it clear that the option is trying another one, *not* quitting therapy altogether. If your child is particularly resistant, they may reject clinicians just to avoid going to therapy. You may need to go through a few such refusals before your child realizes that they can’t stonewall their way out of this work, at which point they might even choose one of the previously rejected therapists.

## What if I need medications?

Most mental health issues show the best improvement when treated with a combination of both therapy and medication.

Some therapists – psychiatrists and nurse practitioners – are able to also prescribe medications. But most are not, so you may need to see one person for therapy and a different person for medication.

If you already take medication, or think you might in the future, you might consider that when looking for a therapist, and try to find either a nurse practitioner or a non-prescribing therapist who works in a group practice which includes prescribers.

The same websites listed above can be used to search for someone to provide medication management (choose “find a psychiatrist” instead of “find a therapist” – even for nurse practitioners). Then you can ask them if they also do therapy, or work with therapists in a group practice. If you already have a therapist, you should tell the potential prescriber this, as some of them will only take clients who are working with their own colleagues.

Depending on your insurance, once you find a prescriber, there might be an extremely long wait list (go ahead and sign up, while you keep looking). This does not mean that you must wait until then to begin medication treatment. You should see your PCP and ask for their assistance. They may be able to start you on a medication, so that when you see the specialist, you already have learned something about what medication seems helpful or unhelpful to you. If a pediatrician is uncertain about how to treat an issue, they can call the Massachusetts Child Psychiatry Access Project (MCPAP) for a consultation.

### **How do I stop treatment?**

Completing treatment can be challenging as well.

First, reflect honestly on your reasons for wanting to stop. If you don’t think the treatment is helpful, talk to your treators about this and see if the treatment plan needs to be adjusted. Or you might need to find a new therapist – even if this one was a good fit at first, you may have made all the progress you can with them, and need someone else to continue improving.

If you feel like your problems are better and you no longer need treatment, consider the possibility that the treatment is part of why you are doing so well – after all, if a blood pressure medicine made your high blood pressure come down, you would be glad you have it, rather than immediately thinking it’s time to quit.

Sometimes treatment costs too much, or there are problems with scheduling or transportation. Talk with your therapist about these concerns. If therapy needs to stop, it is best to end with a conscious process.

If you are stopping therapy but plan to continue medication, be sure that you will be able to do so – if your therapist and prescriber work together, stopping one may make you unable to see the other. If this will be the case, you should **first** make arrangements to transfer your medication management to another provider or your PCP so that there is no interruption in your access to medication.

If you want to stop medication, discuss this with your prescriber. If you have side effects, they want to know. If you think you don’t need it anymore, don’t jump too quickly. Generally, medications should be continued until you have been symptom-free for a full year. When it is time to stop a medication, it is very important to do so under the care of a prescriber who knows the safest way to taper off so that you don’t experience unpleasant or potentially dangerous side effects. If you are no longer in therapy, consider returning to your therapist for this transitional period, to help reinforce the skills you have learned so that you can adjust to the change without your symptoms returning.

If your symptoms do return, resume treatment. It may simply be too soon, and you might still be able to end treatment later. For now, notice the fact that if your treatment is working, life is better. You worked hard to reach this point; you deserve to appreciate it.