

Locating Trauma Informed Therapists

What is Trauma?

When people find themselves suddenly in danger, sometimes they are overcome with feelings of fear, helplessness, or horror. These events can be caused by acts of nature (floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, etc.), war, or violence (a physical attack, sexual violence, etc.). Trauma refers to how a person responds to these experiences; many people feel helpless and disconnected, experience flashbacks, have difficulty concentrating, sleeping, etc. When these effects persist longer than a month and affect a person's daily life, a person can be diagnosed with post traumatic stress disorder or PTSD (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders IV*).

Why is it important to find a therapist who is trauma informed?

Trauma informed service provision addresses the consequences of trauma in the individual to facilitate healing. Treatment generally recognizes the survivor's need to be respected, informed, connected, and hopeful regarding their own recovery; the interrelation between trauma and symptoms of trauma (e.g. substance abuse, eating disorders, depression, anxiety, etc.); and the need to work in a collaborative way with survivors (and also with family and friends of the survivor) and with other human services agencies in a manner that will empower survivors and consumers.

It is vital for individuals who have experienced such an event to receive therapy from providers who are knowledgeable about treating and supporting people who have experienced trauma. Although it may not always be evident, we know that trauma is pervasive and, affects people physically, psychologically, developmentally and their ability to participate in activities of daily living. The effects of trauma complicate diagnosis, treatment and recovery.

On the other side of this sheet is a set of questions that may be helpful for locating trauma-informed therapists in your area. This can be used by anyone seeking a trauma-informed therapist, or by rape crisis centers or other related agencies to find therapists for clients requiring additional services. While we hope the form is comprehensive, keep in mind that you may add and disregard questions relevant to your needs.

Some Helpful Questions for Locating Trauma Informed Therapists

Provider Experience (Select the questions that are relevant to you or your client)

1. Do you screen for trauma with every patient?
2. To what extent have you worked with people who have experienced abuse, including sexual abuse?
3. To what extent have you worked with people who have experienced trauma related to violence? Approximately how many within the last three years?
4. Do you possess skills in certain areas of treatment, i.e. EMDR (Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing), music therapy, play therapy, etc.? Please list your certification/licensure.
5. Have you worked with diverse populations around trauma (Men? Children? People over 60? People from diverse cultures/ethnicities?)
6. Have you worked with people with disabilities (including but not limited to people who are Deaf or hard of hearing, people a range of mental health needs, traumatic brain injury, intellectual, physical, sensory, cognitive disabilities, post traumatic stress disorder)? To what extent?
7. Have you worked with people who have issues with substance use?
8. Have you worked with people who communicate in mode and/or language other than spoken English? Other languages? American Sign Language? Communication devices? Written communication?

Practice Information (Select the questions that are relevant to you or your client)

1. Are you accepting new patients?
2. How long is your waiting list?
3. What are your office hours?
4. Is your office ADA compliant or otherwise easily physically accessible?
5. Do you have after hours/on-call services? Do you offer phone sessions or other alternative formats for seeing clients?
6. Do you accept Medicaid? Medicare? (If you have private insurance, you may want to ask if it is accepted.)
7. Do you have a sliding fee scale for low income clients?