7 Important Qualities to Look for When Choosing the Right Psychotherapist

Most people face significant challenges in their lives at one time or another with family, friends, an intimate relationship or a person with whom they work. Such difficulties can affect your energy level, concentration, motivation and most importantly, how you feel. While speaking with a friend or family member can provide some temporary relief, there is no substitute for the help of a professional psychotherapist or counselor, who can be objective, supportive and on your side. So how do you know what to look in a psychotherapist, when seeking help?

Here are 7 of the most important qualities in a psychotherapist:

1. **Responsiveness** is the first quality to look for in a psychotherapist. Especially when one is new to therapy (and even if you have had some experience,) it can be quite difficult to get up the courage to make the contacts needed to find a therapist in your area and one whose approach sounds right for you. A responsive therapist will return your call within 24 hours, some will call back even sooner.

   Always ask if the therapist offers a free phone consultation. Those who do will give you the opportunity to experience the way in which he/she works and a chance to decide before meeting in person, whether or not you think this therapist would be the right one for you.

2. **Active Listening** is when the therapist focuses entirely on what the patient is saying and reflects back in words an understanding of both what the person has said and the feelings underlying what has been expressed. Feeling heard is essential to a positive patient experience.

3. **Compassion** is an absolutely essential quality to look for in a therapist. Many times, those seeking help already recognize that some of the choices they have made in the past did not work out well for them and so it may be quite hard to share this with a professional who is also a stranger, for fear of being judged or criticized. A compassionate therapist will listen carefully and bring a warm, caring attitude to what they say, offering support and acknowledgement about difficulties the patient is currently experiencing, even if some are due to the patient's own choices.

4. **Creating a Safe Space** is an art form that not all therapists have mastered. A talented therapist will recognize the importance of using their voice, words, eye contact and overall manner to ensure that your opportunities for sharing, reflection and learning happen within a safe, respectful, receptive environment.

5. **Mindfulness** is about paying attention to what is happening now and being fully present (physically, mentally and emotionally) as the patient discusses the issues with which he/she is struggling. To be mindful, a therapist needs to be attentive to both verbal and nonverbal cues such as the patient's overall message, choice of words, tone of voice, body language and also what the patient does not say.

6. **Constructive, Supportive Feedback** offered when it is appropriate, will provide a patient with helpful and well-timed perspectives and suggestions that are more likely to help them to face their challenges effectively. By understanding the nature of being human and how important it is to embrace the idea of learning from our experiences, patients are better able to hear supportive feedback and integrate it into their lives.

7. **Positive Outlook** is essential in a therapist, as it is crucial for those seeking help to have a sense of hope about their circumstances and a belief that they will be able to find a way to maneuver through, regardless of the challenges ahead. A therapist with positive outlook and balanced perspective will help a patient learn how to take things less seriously and find joy and gratitude within themselves as they continue to stretch, change and grow.

Are you facing challenges in your life that are overwhelming? Looking for a caring, experienced professional to help? Contact Joan Stenzler, LCSW now to schedule your complimentary 20 minute phone consultation at 516-522-0573.

To learn more about Joan and her practice, go to: www.JoanStenzlerlcsw.com or www.youramazingjourney.com