

Finding, Selecting & Working with a Behavioral Health Provider: How do you choose the right provider

Congratulations. You are taking a positive step by deciding to seek help for yourself or someone else. Successful treatment is available for most problems. Get the support you or your loved one needs to live your life to the fullest. Although depression and anxiety and other behavioral health and substance use disorders are common, it can be very hard to seek help because of the stigma that unfortunately still exists. Seeking help is in the best interest of you and your loved ones so they can get the care they need.

How to use our tool to find a provider

It's simple and easy to use. Enter a location (zip or city+state) and then filter by your provider preferences (provider type and/or treatment options). Results listed link to more information on each provider or group, including a map to the office.

How do you choose?

One of the most important factors in addressing your behavioral health concern is finding a provider you trust. Fortunately, there are steps you can take to ensure the provider you select is right for you. If possible, you want to choose a provider that works with your health plan or Employee Assistance Plan (EAP) to minimize or eliminate any cost to you. We check the credentials of all providers in our network and provide you with quality indicators, too.

One of the most important factors in addressing your mental health concern is finding a provider you trust. Keep these things in mind to ensure the provider you select is right for you:

- Use our Find a Provider tool to explore various provider options.
- Consider the qualities that are important to you (expertise, gender, location).
- Choose a network provider (choosing a provider that works with your health plan or Employee Assistance Plan (EAP) to minimize or even eliminate any cost to you.
- Find out if your benefit package requires you to get approval to see a provider.
- Contact your health plan for a referral.

Consider Qualities that are Important to You

For instance, what type of background or areas of expertise would you prefer that the provider have? Would you prefer a male or female provider? Would you be more comfortable with a provider who shares your cultural background or language? Should your provider be close to your home or to your work? Consider how far are willing to travel, you don't want distance and travel time to interfere with your ability to attend your sessions.

Consider Using a Network Provider

We review the background and practice of each provider before including them in our network. We check credentials regularly, and make sure we share the latest scientific information about behavioral health disorders and treatment best practices. Also, when you see a network provider you don't have to file a claim;

the Network provider files it for you. If you see an out-of-Network provider, you will need to file the claim. Our members can easily do that online from our site after they register/login. After entry, click "Benefits & Claims". If you are seeing a provider as part of your Employee Assistance Plan (EAP), there is no charge to you but you may need to pre-certify your visit. Members can do that online from the "Benefits & Claims" box too or simply call us.

Contact Us for a Referral

Chemistry is key to having a positive relationship with your provider. If you are a member and are unable to find a provider that is right for you through our online tool, contact us and we will help you find someone whose training, background and expertise fit your preferences and needs. Your Member support phone number is on our web site after you enter with your access code or register/login. If you feel that the provider we referred is not right for you, call us back and we'll help you find another provider who meets your needs. *It is also a good idea for you to call Optum before receiving care, as some benefit plans require you to get a pre-authorization before treatment.*

For EAP Visit Authorization: available on some member pages in Live and Work Well: We require prior approval before you access you EAP services (free face-to-face sessions). You can do this online (for yourself) or via phone (for anyone in your household). Log in with your access code and click on "Employee Assistance Program (EAP)" link under the Benefits item in the top navigation. From there, scroll to the bottom of the page and select the EAP Visit Authorization tile and fill the form out.

Once You Have a Name

Call. If you can talk with the person directly for a few minutes, confirm that they have experience working with people with your type of concerns. You can ask about their approach to working with people. If you feel comfortable, ask to make an appointment.

In reality, you probably will get their receptionist. A given provider's availability to see new patients may change frequently. Ask if they are taking new patients and how soon you could get an appointment. Ask if there is anything special you should bring to the first appointment. (They'll probably just tell you to bring your insurance card!) Get directions to the office and parking information too if you need it.

Many benefit plans require you to call us to obtain authorization before you obtain services. Services that have not been authorized as required by your benefit plan will not be eligible for reimbursement. We will authorize services and providers that are appropriate given your unique circumstances and your benefits (the provider may be different from one you've looked up).

Some of these professionals have very busy schedules. If you have a pressing need, be sure to voice this when you call or have your doctor contact them first. And of course, **if you or a loved one is having an emergency, call 911 or go to the emergency room of your local hospital.**

Learn how to prepare for your first visit and how you will work together

It's always good to be prepared for your first appointment. After talking, you can ask what kind of treatment plan they think is best for you and what approach they will likely take, how long it will take, and the frequency of sessions. If you like the clinician and the way they work and treat you, great. Sometimes you need to talk with several clinicians to find someone you are really comfortable with. It is worth the time and effort.

For Adults —

Preparing for an Appointment

Getting the Most Out of Therapy:

Before you go to see a therapist or doctor about a behavioral health or substance use issue, it may help to know what to expect. We've put together some notes and suggestions to help you prepare for your first appointment and get the most out of therapy.

Preparing For the First Appointment:

When you meet your therapist for the first time it is easy to get confused or forget important information. Writing a few notes to take with you can help. These might include:

- What do you hope to accomplish by going to therapy
- How would you like things to be different at the end of therapy?
- What has been happening in your life that leads you to go to therapy? How long has this been happening and how troubling is it?
- How are your problems affecting your ability to get along with family, friends and co-workers or colleagues? How is it affecting your ability to work or go to school?
- How have you been feeling? Are you experiencing nervousness, depression or other emotions that are troubling?
- What have you done to try to feel better? What has made you feel better in the past?
- Who else have you seen about this problem, including another therapist, your doctor, a clergy or rabbi, or support groups such as AA?

- Bring a list of all medicines you are taking for both physical and behavioral health reasons. Include name, dose, frequency, and any side effects you are experiencing. Bring along contact information for all doctors who are giving you medicine.
- Bring copies of any documents you think might be helpful. These include previous psychological testing, hospital discharge summaries, or recent laboratory results. If you are bringing your child in for therapy, then bring copies of recent school progress reports and psychological testing results.
- Bring a list of any questions you have about how therapy works, including frequency, cost, and what you will need to do. Ask if you will have things you need to do between appointments.
- If you would like, ask if you can include your family or social support in some of the sessions.

The First Appointment:

Try to arrive 15 minutes early for the first appointment to complete paperwork. Appointments will usually last 30-50 minutes. You and the therapist will use the first appointment or two getting to know each other and deciding if the therapist can help you.

During your first meeting with a therapist, you can expect . . .

- To be asked to complete some forms. These will likely ask for information about yourself, your insurance coverage, and about what you are currently going through. You should also be given a statement of the therapist's privacy policy and a statement about your rights and responsibilities in therapy.
- To be asked some questions about yourself and what brought you to therapy. Answer in your own words or bring out the notes you wrote before the first appointment. Be as clear and thorough as you can be so that the therapist can help you.
- At the end of the session, to talk with the therapist about a plan to help you. This may include continuing to meet with the therapist on a regular basis, or the therapist may refer you to another specialist who may be better able to help you. If your therapist recommends that you continue to come to appointments, you should have a clear idea of what to expect to happen during those appointments.
- To feel listened to and comfortable talking with the therapist. You should feel free to express yourself and talk about what is important to you. If you do not, let the therapist know so that you can discuss what to do about it.

If you Need Medicine:

Some behavioral health and substance abuse issues are also treated with medicines. You may be asked to see a Doctor or Nurse Practitioner who can prescribe you medicine. When you meet with this person, it is important to talk to your doctor or nurse practitioner about:

- Any other medicines you are taking.
- Any allergies you have to medicines.
- Medicines you have taken in the past and whether they have helped you.
- Medicines that have been helpful to any other family members who have had the same problems.
- Any side effects you have once you start the medicine.
- Any positive effects you have once you start the medicine.
- Any problems in paying for your medication?

It is very important to be open and honest with your doctor or nurse practitioner so that he/she can make decisions with you about the best medicine for you. There are no lab tests that can be done to find the ideal medicine for you, so your doctor or nurse can only make decisions based on what you report.

Below are some other things to keep in mind when getting help:

Take an Active Role

- Keep your appointments.
- Ask questions.
- Request that your doctors all work together.

Sooner the better

- Go to appointments as often as recommended.
- Appointments may be more often when you start treatment.

Find out more

- Ask your therapist for suggestions about readings and support groups.
- Look through liveandworkwell.com to find more information and resources to help you.

Now what?

Hopefully you find a provider that's right for you or your loved one. You and/or your loved ones begin to feel better and are able to live your life to the fullest. If you are a Member (your benefits are with Optum, OptumHealth, United Behavioral Health or one of our partner organizations), you and your family can use your access code or register/login to access the Member side of this site.

- Use the **Life & Work** and **Mind & Body** tabs to access extensive information to help you live life to the fullest.