

DEVELOPING A RELATIONSHIP WITH YOUR PROVIDER

ISSUES TO CONSIDER WHEN CHOOSING A PROVIDER:

1) GENDER, AGE, CULTURAL BACKGROUND, SEXUAL ORIENTATION/IDENTITY, ETC. Do you have strong preferences about these characteristics?

2) RESPECT & EMPATHY: A good mental health care provider should make you feel like they are on your side, truly listening to your input and seeing you as an equal. If you do not feel this, especially after several meetings, talk to them about it in a direct, yet respectful way. You deserve to feel heard and respected.

3) FAMILY MEMBER INPUT: Does the provider have experience with and see value in meeting with family members? Do they respect your preferences in this regard?

4) TRAINING AND SPECIALIZATION: With what kinds of issues is your provider most experienced? For example, some providers specialize in certain diagnoses (including substance use), behaviors or age groups.



Tips FOR DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP

COMMUNICATE GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS. Of course, we all want to feel better. But the more specific you can be, the more your provider can help.

DESCRIBE PAST EXPERIENCES. If you have had an especially positive OR negative experience with mental health services, try to describe what did or did not work, what you did or did not like. Don't be afraid to express your preferences! Your provider will not be offended.

EXAMPLES: therapeutic strategies, focus areas, general style, mannerisms, etc.

BE HONEST AND OPEN. It takes time to be open and honest with a provider. Some people feel comfortable sharing everything right away, others may take multiple meetings. If you want to share but can't, let your provider know. Together, you can explore possible reasons and solutions.

ADDRESS PROBLEMS. If you feel overwhelmed, like you're not making progress or you're dreading meeting with your provider, talk to your provider about it. An open discussion can build trust and give your provider a better understanding of your needs and preferences.

MAKING AN APPOINTMENT See pages 18-19 for guidance on accessing mental health services. Or, contact your local NAMI or NAMI Wisconsin (local affiliate directory on pages 73-81).



Tips FOR DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE PARTNERSHIP (CONT.)



Partnership is a beautiful thing.

TRUST YOUR GUT. Even if the provider looks great on paper, if the connection doesn't feel right and you have expressed your concerns and nothing has changed -- go with another choice, if you can. The provider will respect this choice and should never make you feel guilty.

KEEP AN EYE ON PROGRESS.

Mental health services are rarely a quick fix and there will be times when you'll feel challenged. Nonetheless, mental health services should be helpful over time. Some questions to ask yourself if you aren't sure if therapy is helping:

- Is one or more area of your life changing for the better? (work, family, social life, etc.)
- Is therapy stretching you beyond your comfort zone?
- Do you feel like you're starting to understand yourself better?
- Do you feel more confident and empowered?
- Are your relationships with people improving?

Everyone has different preferences...

"Making therapy all about goals really stresses me out. Sometimes I just need to talk it out to gain clarity."

—Anonymous

"I like to set concrete goals and strategies for change, not just discuss WHY I feel how I feel."

—Anonymous