

Finding and Engaging Therapists

Why Therapy?

There are many reasons people seek therapy or counselling and there are many questions along the way about therapy's potential value. Family life is and can be complex particularly when adoption or permanent and kinship care are part of the mix. Loss of previous relationships, differing styles of communication, the pre-placement experiences of your child, or cultural difference may disrupt a family's ability to successfully connect. When this occurs it can be experienced as a loss of enjoyment or disconnection to and with each other. Having a therapist can help with exploring new ways of seeing or responding to issues, help to refocus and help to strengthen your skills set.

How to Start

It can be hard to figure out who to see to get the help you need for yourself, your child or your family. It is also easy to have thoughts that stop you from engaging a therapist. Thoughts like I will be embarrassed or judged, it will pass, it wont help anyway or I cant afford it. You would not be alone in those thoughts. The starting point is working out what is the most important area to focus on while also taking into account the age and developmental needs of your child. Often we want to fix every problem we see, but that can be overwhelming and also expensive. Focussing on what is the most important matter first and having a good discussion with a paediatrician or a doctor/general practitioner (GP) is a good starting point. Accessing a well rounded advocacy program (like PCA Families or the [Mental Health Statewide Trauma Service](#)) can help you identify a good place to start and what to target with your child. Of course researching online and talking to peers or friends to get recommendations are also relevant strategies.

Type of Therapy

When you are looking at psychology, psychotherapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy and all those kind of things you need to factor in the needs of your child. Talking therapies may not suit younger children who could engage with play, art or animal therapies. You may also get recommendations to therapies that you consider outside of your scope, perhaps mind body type therapies like nature immersion or therapeutic yoga, but those types of things can be a child's first steps to understanding themselves. Again, speak with your GP or paediatrician about these therapies.

Questions to Ask

A good therapist will be happy to discuss any concerns you may have prior to making a commitment to engage in therapy. They will also be open to a trial period rather than a hefty commitment. When making initial contact with a practitioner, be as specific and to the point about the issues affecting your situation as you can be. Ask about their experience in working with families formed through care or adoption and how their professional training and background informs their understanding. While you may not be familiar with the therapeutic labels, a therapist should be able to explain their approach in simple terms.

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The family's involvement and support for the child in therapy is critical to a positive outcome; trust and respect is an essential element of the practitioner's relationship with child and family. Therapists competent in adoption and homebased care value carer and parent participation and understand that no intervention should threaten these relationships.

Practitioners will work with families in many ways. Make sure you have an understanding of their intentions and usual practice. Ask how you will stay informed, how flexible they will be when your child is not up to therapy and how they will advise when its time to pull back so that you don't overload your child. If you are uncomfortable with or unsure of any information provided, seek clarification. Check in on your child's comfort levels as you progress - they will be able to guide you.

Ask what you might expect to see as your child engages in therapy and your involvement to assist your child through transitions. If you will be seeing a therapist under the Better Access to Mental Health Initiative (Medicare rebate), ask what if any conditions or restrictions apply that might impact on the structure and conduct of sessions.

Appointments, Fees and Rebates

Make sure clinic appointment times fit with your family requirements. Ask about wait-lists and any periods that your practitioner might be unavailable during your expected time of engagement. A short wait for the right therapist is sometimes worthwhile, depending on your needs and circumstances.

To access the Medicare rebate under the Better Access to Mental Health Care initiative, your therapist will require Medicare provider registration. If they do not offer bulk billing, ask how much the gap payment amount is over the Medicare rebate. If you are in financial hardship you can try to negotiate a fee reduction, however this is not common practice.

Sometimes professionals may work outside their formal office, in schools for example. This arrangement may work better for your family. Private health insurance with ancillary cover may enable you to claim a rebate for psychological services. Ask your health insurance provider for details.

Challenges or Pitfalls?

There are other challenges you may want to consider. Consider the suggestions in our YouTube recording on finding therapists for children with a trauma history [here](#).

References and links

[Find a Therapist Youtube Recording PCA Families](#)
[Statewide Trauma Service](#)