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To: scott@afamilyforeverychild.org
Subject: Selecting and Working with a Therapist
Attachments: Manual-15-Selecting and Working with therapist skilled in adoption.pdf



Dear ,

If you are adopting an out-of-state child, you will most likely have to go through the process of finding them a new therapist. With so many different types of therapists and therapies out there, it can be confusing trying to select the one that will be right for your child. The Child Welfare Information Gateway has put together a guide that will assist you in that process. To view the complete guide, download the attachment that is included at the bottom of the email or visit their [site](#).

**Please note that this is for informational purposes only, and that you should do your research and consult with your adoption worker and the child's caseworker to find a therapist that will be able to work best with your family.

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Professionals who provide mental health services

Pediatrician or Family Practice

Physician: Pediatricians are primary care physicians who specialize in treating children and adolescents for routine medical conditions. They will refer children to specialists for additional diagnostic studies or procedures as needed.

Psychiatrist: Medical doctors who specialize in diagnosing and treating mental and emotional disorders. Psychiatrists are able to prescribe medications to patients.

Clinical Psychologist: Assess and treat mental, behavioral, and emotional disorders, including short and long-term mental illnesses.

Clinical Neuropsychologist: Assess and treats brain diseases and injuries, neurological and medical conditions, and learning and memory disorders. Work with patients to determine if a mental health problem is medical or psychological.

Social Worker: Sometimes called **psychotherapists**, social workers focus on a child and their family and their social environment. A licensed clinical social worker (L.C.S.W) has passed a test in his/her state allowing them to offer counseling services to their clients.

Marriage and Family Therapist: Sometimes referred to as a **Couples and Family Therapist**, marriage and family therapists address relationship issues within the family. They focus mainly on building communication, family structure and boundaries. They evaluate and treat mental and emotional disorders.

Licensed Counselor: A licensed counselor is licensed in their state to practice counseling with an individual or group.

Approaches to therapy

Play Therapy: This type of therapy is often used with very young children who may not be able to express their feelings verbally. During play therapy, the therapist will engage the child in pretend play using toys as a way to get the child to communicate. The child will be able to act out their feelings this way, and reveal any emotional trauma. Play therapists who also specialize in attachment will include the parent in the play therapy session, to work on building communication and attunement between parent and child.

Individual Psychotherapy: In this form of psychotherapy, the therapist will work one-on-one with the child to verbally identify what is troubling them and then working on ways to manage their problems. Individual psychotherapy abides by the belief that people should take responsibility for their own actions and emotional well-being.

Group Therapy: Allows a small group of clients who have similar problems to come together and discuss them. Sometimes a family member will be asked to join a group therapy session. Group therapy is commonly used with adolescents.

Family Therapy: The goal of family therapy is to achieve balance between an individual's needs and a family's needs. A family therapist who specializes in adoption will work with the family to build attachment and communication between the parent(s) and child(ren). They will also recognize and work through the influence a previous family has had on the child (birth family or foster family).

Behavior Modification: Focuses on the specific behaviors that are of concern to the family. The stimuli that maintain the behavior are seen as more important than the source, and parents learn how to reward appropriate behavior and use effective methods of discipline.

Pastoral Counselor: Provide faith-based counseling. Examples of pastoral counselors include rabbis, pastors, ministers, and priests. They focus on providing the family with support and interventions, using spirituality as an additional source of support.

*It is important for adoptive families to share openly with their mental health professional that their family includes one or more adopted persons and to inquire about the counselor's training and experience related to working with adoptive families and adopted persons. More and more States offer postgraduate certificates to mental health professionals to help them to understand the dynamics of adoption and to tailor treatment modalities to the needs of families and individuals affected by adoption.

Cognitive Therapy: This type of therapy typically focuses on the present, and works with the idea that how an individual perceives a situation influences how they feel. It emphasizes skills that enhance self-control and reduce violent behavior. This type of therapy may not be best for children who have trouble regulating their emotions due to past trauma.

Trauma-Informed Therapy: This type of therapy focuses on the type, frequency, and duration of trauma a child has endured, in addition to the age and developmental stage of the child. It focuses on ways to help make traumatic memories and experiences more tolerable.

An issue brief concerning therapy for the trauma of sexual abuse is available on the Information Gateway website: [Trauma-Focused Cognitive Behavioral Therapy: Addressing the Mental Health of Sexually Abused Children](#)

For more information, visit the Child Welfare Information Gateway [resource page](#) on trauma-informed care. You may also want to visit [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#).

Attachment-Focused Therapy: Focuses on building a secure emotional attachment between child and caregiver. Parent(s) need to be active participants in the sessions since the therapy revolves around building a trusting attachment.

Other Therapies: There are many other therapy types that your child may benefit from including music therapy, art therapy, sensory-motor therapy, neurofeedback therapy, and couples therapy.

Ask the therapist what the treatment goals are before you decide what type of therapy your child would benefit most from.

Treatment Settings

Most therapy sessions take place in what is called an **outpatient setting**. An outpatient setting is where a client is seen in a therapist's office usually once a week.

If outpatient therapy is not providing to be sufficient, a child may benefit from a **residential treatment center**. These centers provide 24-hour care and are designed for children and youth who have substance abuse needs or serious psychiatric needs. The style of the center will vary, but they are all private and are usually set up as individual community homes, campus-type settings, or a hospital setting. Programs at the residential treatment center focus on developing positive coping skills and personal responsibility.

A couple different types of therapy often used in residential treatment centers include behavioral therapy or relationship-based treatment. **Behavioral therapy** focuses on rewarding the child for good behavior. One of the downsides of this approach is it does not examine what causes the undesirable behaviors. In **relationship-based treatment**, healing is promoted through relationships a child establishes with the staff members. Family connections are also critical in this type of therapy, as it is important for the child to remain connected and aware of the relationships they have with their family.

Short-term emergency treatment is available for children with serious emotional problems in a **psychiatric hospital**. When outpatient therapy is not producing results, and if a child is becoming suicidal or dangerous to themselves or others, it may become necessary to place them in a psychiatric hospital. It is very important that a child's family remains involved in their treatment at the psychiatric hospital. If you are not automatically

Finding the right therapist

Identifying Prospective Therapists: Take your time in finding a mental health provider that has the experience and knowledge to help address the needs of your child and family. It is important that the therapist is skilled in figuring out what is an adoption problem and what is not, since an adopted child may present problems that can be common to any non-adopted child. Typically mental health professionals that have skills and backgrounds in attachment and trauma are best suited for adoptive families. At the very least a therapist must:

- Be knowledgeable about adoption and the impact it can have psychologically on children and families.
- Be knowledgeable about trauma and the impact it can have on children and families, in addition the problems that result from traumatic experiences pre-adoption.
- Be knowledgeable about attachment, and the role and impact it has on the mind/body of the child.
- Have experience working with adopted children and their families.
- Be familiar with the types of help available for adoption-related issues.
- Have training in working with adoptive families.

To find a therapist, contact a community adoption support network, your placement agency, or do online research. You can also reach out to a local support group who often have lists of therapist who have been trained to work with adoptive families. You may also search Child Welfare Information Gateway's [Related Organizations](#) to find therapists in your area.

included in therapy sessions, make sure to request that you are.

Interviewing Prospective Therapists: Parents should call and schedule an interview with potential therapists to find out some general information. Some therapists will provide this consultation service free of charge. To start out, you should give the therapist a brief description of the concerns you have about your child. You should then ask the following questions during your consultation:

-What types of experience do you have with adoptive families and adoption issues? (Make sure to be specific about the adoption issues that are effecting your family).

-How long have you been practicing? What degrees, licenses, or certifications do you have?

-Have you done any continuous clinical training on adoption issues? Who oversaw your training?

-Do you include parents and/or other family members in the therapy sessions? Do you prefer to work with the entire family or only the child(ren)?

-Can you provide us with regular reports on the child's progress?

-Can you give us an estimated time frame for the course of the therapy sessions?

-What types of approaches to therapy do you use? (See "Approaches to Therapy"). What changes can we expect to see as a result of the therapy?

-Do you work with teachers, daycare providers, juvenile justice personnel, and other adults when appropriate?

In addition, you should also ask about:

-Who will cover the therapist if they are not available and you have an emergency

-When they have available appointment times

-What their fees are, and if they accept insurance, adoption subsidy medical payments, or Medicaid reimbursement payments.

