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National Eating Disorder Information Centre

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TIPS FOR CHOOSING PROFESSIONAL HELP



There are numerous types of help for overcoming an eating disorder including: outpatient individual or group therapy, professionally facilitated support groups, [peer support](#), self-help groups, [residential treatment](#), and [inpatient treatment](#). While some treatment services can only be accessed in-person, others are available online.

It might take some research or trial and error to find the type of support you need. If you decide to seek professional help, remember that you are purchasing a service. In the same way that you might “shop around” before purchasing an expensive item, you can consult with multiple professionals and ask them questions to help you decide what is right for you. It is important to be aware that individuals providing counselling or therapeutic services vary widely in their education, training, and experience. There are no laws governing who can call themselves a “[counsellor](#)” or “therapist” in most settings. However, there are specific titles, such as “Registered Clinical [Counsellor](#)”, “Registered [Psychotherapist](#)”, and “[Occupational Therapist](#)”, to name a few, that are protected by provincial laws. You have a right to know what a professional’s qualifications are. Many professions require registration with a regulatory body in order for individuals to use a specific title and legally provide certain counselling or therapy services. Some regulatory bodies maintain an online public listing of the professionals who are registered with them. You may be able to verify online that a professional with whom you are considering working is indeed what they claim to be.



REFERRALS

Access to some specialized eating disorder services – typically those that are provincially-funded – will require a referral. For example, you may need one to see a psychiatrist or enter a hospital-based treatment program. Referrals usually must be completed by a primary care provider (family doctor, general practitioner, or nurse practitioner) and will involve obtaining bloodwork results. Many of these specialized service providers have referral forms available on their website.



QUESTIONS TO ASK

You may want to prepare a list of questions to ask professionals with whom you are considering working. Many professionals offer free 15- to 30-minute consultations to prospective clients. The following are questions you may want to ask, if they are applicable to your situation.

Fees

- What do you charge per session? How long are sessions?
- Do you have a sliding fee scale? I cannot afford your regular fees – do you have space in your practice at this time to work with me?
- What forms of payment do you accept? When would payment be due?
- I have insurance benefits through my school/ employer – are you set up for direct billing?

Location

- Is your location accessible by public transit? Is parking available?
- I have mobility issues – is your office fully accessible?
- Can you tell me a little bit about your office location?
- How do you keep your online services secure and private?

Availability

- What days and hours are you available?
- Do you have a waiting list?
- How long can I expect to work with you?
- How frequent would sessions be?
- What is your availability if I am in crisis? What are my options if I am in crisis?

Training and Experience

- What is your educational background? What education and training have you obtained specifically in helping people with eating disorders?
- What is your experience in treating eating disorders? How long have you been practicing in the field of eating disorders?
- Which professional college(s) do you belong to? (e.g., College of Social Workers, College of Dietitians, College of Psychologists)
- How do you stay up-to-date with current research and developments in the area of eating disorder treatment?

Treatment Approach

- What approach(es) do you use? (e.g., Health at Every Size®, cognitive-behavioural, emotion-focused, solution-focused, narrative, trauma-informed)
- Will you explain how you work with clients?
- What are the measurable criteria you use to assess how well treatment is working? How do you define “success” – in terms of eating, weight, and mental state?

Collaboration

- I am also looking for a _____ (dietitian, counsellor, psychologist, etc.) – are there ones with whom you work closely and could recommend?
- I am already seeing a _____ (dietitian, counsellor, psychologist, etc.) – how would you work with them?
- Do my parents/loved ones need to be involved in my treatment? If yes, how would they be involved?



IF THINGS DO NOT FEEL RIGHT

If something feels “off” to you about the work you are doing with a professional, it may be helpful to talk things out with someone you trust (e.g., family member, close friend). If you are not feeling supported, helped, empowered, and safe in your work with a professional, be honest with them. Express to them how you feel and what your needs are. If the professional is unwilling or unable to meet your needs, move on. It is important not to stay with someone who is not helping you or is doing harm.

Examples of behaviours that are inappropriate and unacceptable for a professional to engage in include:

- Spending session time discussing their own personal life, problems, etc.
- Giving confusing, inconsistent information
- Avoiding or refusing to answer questions about their credentials, accountability, etc.
- Communicating in ways that make you feel devalued, intimidated, or pressured
- Sharing your confidential information without your consent (note: in a limited number of situations, to ensure your safety or the safety of others, a professional may need to break confidentiality)
- Making comments or gestures of a sexual nature (e.g., telling lewd jokes, asking you out on dates, touching you without your consent)

If they are a registered professional, you may file a complaint with their regulatory body which will then investigate their conduct. You deserve to receive competent, respectful care.

Definitions of the underlined terms on this tip sheet are available at
www.nedic.ca/eating-disorders-treatment

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