



# Selecting a Mental Health Professional





## Selecting a Mental Health Professional

Maybe I should talk to someone about how I'm feeling: How do I choose the right mental health professional for me?

Recovering from a traumatic event takes time, and sometimes help from a trained professional is necessary. Trauma affects people in many different ways: physically, mentally, behaviorally, spiritually and/or emotionally. Talking with the right mental health professional can help you to recognize and process your feelings, and develop positive ways to deal with them. When people experience a serious physical injury, they immediately think about seeking medical attention. Experiencing a traumatic event that leads to mental or emotional injury should be handled in the same way—by seeking the assistance of a mental health professional.

Here are some things to help think about how you are feeling and if needed, find a mental health professional right for you.



## ***How are you feeling after the experience?***

Experiencing a crime yourself or knowing someone who is a victim of a crime can affect how you see yourself and what you think about the world. It is normal and expected to react emotionally or experience changes in your behavior after such events. Most people will begin to feel more like themselves within a reasonable amount of time after an event. However, some people may develop behaviors or thoughts that make it hard to get through a normal day. Some behaviors and thoughts to watch out for are:

### ***Physical***

- Change in eating habits (more/less than usual)
- Change in sleep habits (more/less than usual)
- Low energy
- Chronic, unexplained pain
- Headaches/gastrointestinal (GI) distress
- Change in sexual behavior (more/less than usual)

### ***Behavioral***

- Change in social activity (more/less than usual)
- Withdrawing/avoiding others
- Engaging in self-destructive or risky behavior
- Increased alcohol/substance use



## *Emotional*

- Depression
- Sense of hopelessness
- Unexplained anxiety
- Panic attacks
- Fearfulness
- Feeling out of control
- Increased irritability
- Sudden bursts of anger
- Feeling numb or disconnected

## *Thinking/Reasoning*

- Memory lapses
- Difficulty making decisions
- Lack of concentration
- Guilt/blaming

## *Spiritual*

- Loss of meaning in your life
- Questioning your place in the world
- Changes in your beliefs/assumptions about life and death
- Disruption of your connection to a higher power



## ***Are you taking care of yourself?***

It is one thing to recognize how you are feeling, thinking, and behaving after a crime. The next step is to proactively work to protect your emotional and mental health. If you're struggling to do this on your own, don't be afraid to talk to someone who can help you make helpful changes. A mental health professional could be that person.

Referrals or recommendations for mental health providers can come from many sources. Your FBI Victim Service Provider can assist you with finding a mental health professional whether you've seen one before or not. You can also take steps on your own to find the right help for you and your situation. Friends, family members, and/or clergy members may be able to help make a recommendation. Healthcare providers may also be able to make referrals. In addition, your health insurance carrier may maintain a list of providers. Other resources such as your employer's Employee Assistance Program (EAP), local health department, and local or national mental health professional organizations may also have lists of providers in your area. Below are recommended criteria to consider when selecting a mental health professional:



## Question: What should I look for in a mental health professional?

**Answer:** When selecting a mental health professional, consider the following:

- Education, training, licensing, and years in practice — licensing requirements vary by state
- Areas they specialize in and specific services they offer
- Treatment approaches and how they work with clients
- If they accept your health insurance provider
- Office hours, fees, and length of sessions

## Question: What type of mental health professional would meet my needs?

**Answer:** Most mental health professionals treat a range of conditions, but one focused on trauma-related conditions and experiences may have the experience and skills that best suit your needs. Some other factors to consider include the severity of your symptoms and the possible need for medication. Your health insurance provider may have a list of mental health professionals who are covered, or may only cover certain types of mental health providers.

## Question: How is mental health care paid for?

**Answer:** Check with your insurance provider to find out what types of mental health services are covered and how much of the cost can be covered. Also, talk with your victim service provider about crime victim's compensation and other available options.

# Question: What are the types of mental health professionals and the services they provide?

A **Psychiatrist** is a physician — medical doctor (M.D.) or doctor of osteopathic medicine (D.O.) — who specializes in psychiatric medicine or general mental health. They can:

- Diagnose and treat mental health disorders
- Provide psychological therapy, also called psychotherapy
- Prescribe medication

A **Psychologist** is trained in the science dealing with thoughts, emotions and behaviors. Typically, a psychologist holds a doctoral degree (Ph.D., Psy.D., Ed.D.). They can:

- Diagnose and treat mental health disorders, provide psychotherapy and psychological counseling, in one-on-one or group settings
- Not prescribe medication unless he or she is licensed for this purpose
- Work with another provider who can prescribe medication

A **Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurse** (P.M.H.N.) is a registered nurse with training in mental health studies. A Psychiatric-Mental Health Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (P.M.H.-A.P.R.N.) has at minimum a master's degree in psychiatric-mental health nursing. Other types of advanced practice nurses who provide mental health services include a Clinical Nurse Specialist (C.N.S.), a Certified Nurse Practitioner (C.N.P) or a Doctorate of Nursing Practice (D.N.P.). They can:

- Provide treatment according to the level of their education, training, and state law.
- Assess, diagnose, and treat mental illnesses depending on their education, training, and experience
- Prescribe medication — if an advanced practice nurse and state law allows





A certified **Physician Assistant** (P.A.-C.) practices medicine as a primary care provider or in collaboration with a physician. Some physician assistants specialize in psychiatry. They can:

- Diagnose and treat mental health disorders
- Counsel on diagnoses, treatments and prognosis, and provide education
- Prescribe medication

A **Licensed Clinical Social Worker** (L.C.S.W.) or a **Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker** (L.I.C.S.W.) has training and experience specifically in the intersection of social work and mental health. A licensed clinical social worker must have a Master's degree in Social Work (M.S.W.) and some have a Doctorate in Social Work (D.S.W. or Ph.D.). They can:

- Provide assessment, diagnosis, psychotherapy and counseling, and a range of other services, depending on their licensing and training
- Are not licensed to prescribe medication
- Work with another provider who can prescribe medication

Training required for a **Licensed Professional Counselor (L.P.C.)**, Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (L.C.P.C.) or similar titles may vary by state, but most have at minimum a master's degree with clinical experience and some have a doctorate degree in a behavioral health area. They can:

- Provide diagnosis and counseling for a range of concerns
- Not prescribe medication
- Work with another provider who can prescribe medication

Finding the right mental health professional is like finding the right pair of jeans--one size doesn't fit all. It can be helpful to identify three mental health professionals you think you would like to work with and interview each one. Most mental health professionals will allow a no-cost trial visit when requested. This way you can try out the mental health professional to see if you think the two of you will work well together. If the first mental health professional you decide to work with doesn't seem right, that's ok. Try the next name on your list. You won't hurt the mental health professional's feelings. The right mental health professional helps you to develop and maintain a good therapeutic relationship—which allows you to get the most out of your treatment. Ask lots of questions and make an informed decision. If you need additional help selecting a mental health professional, contact your FBI Victim Service Provider.



## Resources that can help you find a mental health professional:

- American Psychiatric Association
- American Psychological Association
- National Association of Social Workers
- GoodTherapy
- Mental Health Consumer Assistance – Substance Abuse & Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) Treatment locator
- National Alliance on Mental Illness
- National Institute of Mental Health
- PsychologyToday

## Your FBI Victim Service Provider

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The FBI Victim Service Provider assigned to your case is there to make sure you have information and support to help you get through this ordeal. She or he will explain the criminal justice process, listen to your concerns, help you find counseling and other forms of assistance, and keep you updated on the status of the case. The Victim Service Provider works for the FBI but is not an Agent. Instead, the Victim Service Provider is often someone with a social work or counseling degree and experience working with young people and adults who have been victims of violent crime.

The Victim Service Provider works as part of a team with the FBI Agent and employees from the U.S. Attorney's Office. While most of the discussions that you have with your Victim Service Provider are confidential, there may be times when the Victim Service Provider will need to share information you provide with other team members. If you have questions about limited confidentiality, you may contact your Victim Service Provider for clarification. Generally, the Victim Service Provider and the Agent will make every effort to protect your privacy.

## Important Contact Numbers

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**FBI Victim Service Provider:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**FBI Special Agent:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_



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