

## Consider Therapy

Many of us have found therapy helpful. It's helpful to have the support for ourselves. If your partner will go too, they can often hear and accept things from a therapist that they cannot from us. This seems to be especially true when it comes to things about their children and ex-wife.

What Should a Childless Stepmom Look for in a Therapist?(a compilation from posts in our online community) Therapists are no different than the general public. There are good ones, bad ones and ones who fall in between. The best way to find a good one is to ask around &ndash; particularly if you know another stepfamily who has been helped by someone. Recommendations from your family physician, clergy or the school social worker can be helpful. Be careful of those recommended by web sites &ndash; some are &lsquo;endorsed&rsquo; by a stepfamily organization after they purchase expensive training from that same endorsing agency. The only standard is that they paid the bill. Most reputable therapists get their training in-person from a variety of providers who are accredited by the licensing agency in their state.

- What license does the therapist hold? Licensing requirements vary by state. Ask what the license is and what the requirements are to receive it. Most states have web sites that list the people with licenses in the state and notes if there is any disciplinary action pending. Search your state name and 'licensing boards', 'social workers', 'counselors', 'psychologists', etc.
- What kind of supervision do they receive? Most therapists go over their cases with another clinician that has a higher license than themselves, i.e. an Licensed Social Worker (LSW) may be supervised by a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) or a Psychologist. If they aren't supervised by anyone that can be a warning. How do they know they aren't missing something or that their own issues have not gotten in the way?
- How long have they been in practice?
- What is their experience in working with stepfamilies and their issues?
- Have they had specific training in stepfamily dynamics?
- Are they familiar with the term &lsquo;parental alienation&rsquo; and what is their definition of it? Therapists who do not understand parental alienation are not likely to understand the step-parenting issues we face. They also are not keeping up with what is current in the psychodynamics of the stepfamily world.
- Do you feel like you are really being listened to when you are talking to them? Are they responding at a level that is comfortable for you or do they talk too much or too little? Are they making eye contact?
- Do you feel a connection? Do you feel cared for by them or is the person cold and removed? It's ok for a therapist to just not be a good fit. Just as you are not best friends with everyone you meet or willing to marry everyone you date, a therapist is a personal thing and you will work better with some than others. Therapists know that and will not be offended if you say &lsquo;this just doesn't feel like a good fit for me&rsquo;. You aren't going to hurt their feelings. They may even be feeling the same thing.
- Gender makes a difference for some people. When in doubt pick a same-sex therapist. You have a more common frame of experience and reference. This is not to say women can't help men, and men help women. If all else is equal however, you may do better with a same sex therapist.
- Non-judgmental. The therapist is supposed to have their own issues under control during your session, and they are the ones who are supposed to be the professional. I want them to be self-disclosing enough so that I know they are human and relate to me and not so much so that I feel like we're working out their issues.
- Knowledge and training in family systems. If they can't help you see how your Family of Origin stuff is playing out in my present then they may not be addressing the root cause.
- Personally, I need someone who will interact with me. I can stand in the mirror, say 'uh-huh', 'tell me more' and keep the \$100+/hr. I want someone who will help me sort out my feelings, support my objectives and confront me when I'm out of line - and they better know how to do that in an appropriate manner. I'm not paying for abuse, either!