

Getting the Support You Deserve: finding your right counselor

Finding a counselor who is the right fit for you can feel a little daunting. Finding one who understands the unique experience of being a mother without living children? Even more daunting.

It is, however, possible.

Here are a few tips that may help make the process less overwhelming.

Be clear on what you need from a counselor

We all have different expectations and needs when it comes to therapy.

Some may just want someone to talk with, to share their story with, and use as a sounding board. Others might want really practical, concrete tools and feedback. Some are looking for help to stay grounded and process the trauma of their child's death and the events surrounding that experience. Maybe it's some combination of the all of this.

Before you even start looking at counselors or making phone calls/sending emails – take some time to figure out what you need from your counselor.

Search, Read, Read Some More

This is quite possibly the most challenging part, depending on where you live - finding counselors to even initiate the process with.

Some towns are overloaded with possible counselors and sorting through them is just plain overwhelming and confusing. Other places hardly have any to choose from.

First, ask around with family and friends. Chances are you know people who've been in or are in counseling. Ask them for recommendations.

Second, check out online counselor directories. The two big ones are [Psychology Today](#) and [Good Therapy](#). You can search by your areas, narrow by insurance type, presenting issues, etc.

Scroll through and click on profiles of those who catch you attention. Make a list of those with profiles that feel in alignment with what you want. Check out their personal websites, read any testimonials, and get a sense of them as best you can.

Ask Questions

Once you have a short list of names that feel like potential good fits, start making phone calls or sending emails.

Keeping in mind what you need out of counseling, ask questions. Ask about their philosophy of counseling. Ask about their experience with grief. Ask specifically if they have worked with pregnancy or infant loss or with mothers who don't have living children. Ask about their beliefs around grief.

Ask the questions that you need in order to feel reasonably safe in bringing your grief and pain to their door (also keeping in mind that the initial session is pretty much always a little awkward and uncomfortable).

Most counselors will be fine with spending 5-10 minutes answering your questions. If you require more than a few minutes for your questions, it may be simpler to simply schedule a session and see how it feels in person.

If a counselor is unwilling to answer a few simple questions, just move on to the next one on your list. That particular counselor isn't a good fit.

Think of the first session as a first date

When we go out with someone for a first date, we don't go into it thinking we'll be with this person forever. We go into it to find out if this is someone we might want to be with long-term.

Approach your first counseling session in the same way. Use the first session to get to know them and see if you feel comfortable and safe with them. If they feel like a good fit, then terrific, move forward with counseling.

If they don't feel like a good fit – for any reason – it's ok to walk away. Just let them know you don't think it's going to work and move onto someone else from your list.

Research, counseling clients, and any good counselor will tell you that the most important factor in the success of counseling is the relationship between counselor and client. It may seem like a pain in the rear to go through all this work to find a counselor, but a little extra effort in the beginning to find the right person will pay off tenfold going forward.

Be open to different options

It's possible you could run into the situation where there isn't a counselor in your area who has the experience or skill with grief that you need or you struggle to find a local counselor who feels like a good fit.

Fortunately, these days with the benefit of technology, it is possible to find counselors who work long-distance with Skype (or something similar) or by phone. If you can't find someone in your local area, consider expanding your search to counselors in other areas who provide "distance" or "virtual" counseling options.

Or perhaps you simply aren't one who digs the idea of weekly meetings or long-term counseling. You may consider grief retreats or more short-term, intensive counseling options.

The bottom line is that you deserve to have the support you need in the format that works for you. Taking the extra time and effort to find the best match for your needs will be well worth it in the end.