



FAQ about mental health services:

How do you find a mental health professional?

- **Are you going through insurance?**
 - Most insurance companies/plans provide some amount of mental health services per year, and they do *not* require a referral from your primary care doctor to access these services. You will need to check with your insurance about how many sessions are covered
 - You can call the number on the back of your insurance card for mental health services or log on to your insurance website. Search for mental health providers *in network* in your area
 - Look for ones that have experience working with children or adolescents and are accepting new patients
 - **You will need to call them directly; our office cannot do that for you.**
 - Many will offer a brief "free" consultation session to assess your needs and determine if they are a good fit
 - You may need to call several before finding one that is a good fit for your child, is taking new patients and accepts your insurance.
 - Some insurance companies/plans will let you go to any mental health professional, but some are "in network" and some are "out of network"
 - In-network usually means better insurance coverage and lower out of pocket costs for you
 - Out of network usually means lower insurance coverage and higher out of pocket costs for you
- **Are you going to pay out of pocket and not go through insurance?**
 - You can ask your friends, your child's school, or your family's health care professionals for references
 - Therapy is a very individual fit, everyone may "love" a certain therapist but you or your child may not mesh well and vice versa
 - Some offer a sliding scale so it's worth asking
 - You will get a bill that you will be expected to pay at the time of service, you can then submit it to your insurance company. Sometimes a certain portion of that bill [or, in rare cases, all of it] will be covered by insurance
- There can be other community resources in your area that can help but it involves lots of searching and asking questions
- It can take a long time to get established as a new patient [2 to 6 months]

- Most mental health visits are confidential, and no information is shared with anyone unless you as a patient or parent give permission. This means that your regular PCP may not know you are seeing anyone unless you tell them.
- If there are more urgent concerns such as potential harm to oneself or suicidal ideation this is a mental health emergency. The best place to take your child would be an emergency room for an urgent psychiatric evaluation.

Who should I see?

- There are different types of mental health professionals with different types of training:
 - Psychiatrist: medical doctor [MD or DO] who specializes in mental health. They can prescribe medication in addition to other types of therapy.
 - Psychologist:
 - Can be PhD or PsyD in clinical or counseling psychology
 - PhD: went to a research-based grad program, created a study and wrote a paper/dissertation
 - PsyD: clinical degree and more focused on clinical aspects of psychosocial therapy
 - Can also have an MS (Master's degree) and work under supervision of PhD or PsyD
 - Licensed psychologists are qualified to do counseling and psychotherapy, perform psychological testing, and provide treatment for mental disorders. In most states, including California, they cannot prescribe meds.
 - Licensed mental health counselor
 - Has an MA [master's degree] in psychology, counseling or related field
 - Has additional working experience working with a qualified mental health professional after graduate school
 - Different states may have different acronyms. In California: LMFT [licensed marriage and family therapist] also known as LMFCC [Licensed Marriage, family and child counselor]
 - They are qualified to evaluate and treat mental problems by providing counseling or psychotherapy
 - Licensed Clinical social worker [LCSW]
 - has at least a master's degree in social work and training to be able to evaluate and treat mental illnesses
 - typically work in a hospital-based setting
 - Can provide psychotherapy, case management, hospital discharge planning, patient advocate
 - Psychiatric or mental health nurse
 - Nurses who have had special training in providing mental health services
 - can evaluate patients for mental illness and provide treatment in the form of psychotherapy
 - In some states, they are also licensed to prescribe and monitor medications, sometimes independently and sometimes under the supervision of a medical doctor

- In California a Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner, or NP, can prescribe medication but a registered nurse, or RN, cannot. Many NPs work in collaboration with other health professionals to manage their patients.

What is the difference between counseling and psychotherapy?

- Counseling is more short term and focuses on a specific issue and/or addresses a particular problem such as losing a loved one or facing a personal health crisis.
- Psychotherapy is more long term and can focus on a wider range of issues, also called talk therapy
 - Different kinds of psychotherapy: psychoanalytic, behavioral, cognitive, humanistic, integrative or holistic

How will I know if I need medication?

- Your mental health professional can help with that question, and if they cannot prescribe medication, they can often help you find a professional who can do that.

How long do I have to go to therapy?

- There is no standard answer to this, it requires a more individualized answer that depends on many factors: age, what issues are involved, and additional situational stressors.
- You should check in regularly with your mental health professional about this question.

If you have other questions, please feel free to reach out to our office.