# Finding an ADHD-Informed Therapist

**A neuroaffirming therapist search toolkit**

Finding a therapist can be hard. ADHD can make the process harder. This toolkit is meant to make the process a little easier.

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**Use what helps, skip everything else.**

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## Three simple steps

1. **Before the consultation:** decide what matters to you, search for and choose a few people to contact.

2. **The consultation:** ask questions and notice how you connect and feel.

3. **After the consultation:** reflect and document your experience with the therapist.

# 1. Before the Consultation

*Circle what matters to you most in your therapy services, then sort your selections into the chart below.*

### Practical

cost • insurance • sliding scale • location • telehealth • in person • evening hours • daytime hours • schedule flexibility • accessibility • cancellation policy • wait time

### Identity + worldview

LGBTQ+ affirming • religion or spirituality • secular • cultural understanding • racial or ethnic identity • gender • social justice awareness • disability awareness

### ADHD + neurodivergence

adult ADHD experience • AuDHD experience • neuroaffirming approach • executive function support • accommodations • late diagnosis experience • lived experience • does not require masking

### Therapy approach

Brainspotting • CBT • ACT • DBT • EMDR • IFS or parts work • somatic therapy • mindfulness • self-compassion • psychodynamic • person-centered • skills or coaching support

### Therapist style

casual • formal • gentle • direct • mostly listening • active feedback • client-led • more structured • emotionally expressive • more reserved • flexible • practical

### Experience + background

fully licensed • prelicensed therapist • years in practice • ADHD-specific training • advanced modality training • certification • trauma experience

### Other (add your own)

| NEED | PREFER | DOESN'T MATTER | NOT SURE |
|---|---|---|---|
| | | | |

# Types of Therapy

## Thought + behavior focused

*Practical and structured. You may notice patterns, test strategies and practice new skills. Homework may be involved and may focus on changing thought patterns.*

- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) • Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) • Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy (REBT)

## Acceptance + mindfulness focused

*Focus on making room for thoughts and feelings while choosing actions that fit your values. May practice observing your internal experiences with compassion and equanimity.*

- Acceptance Commitment Therapy (ACT) • Mindful Self-Compassion (MSC) • Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) • Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy (MBCT)

## Body + trauma processing focused

*Works with body sensations, attention, and trauma processing (bottom-up). Can include talking or less talking, more of an emphasis on guided internal experience in a supportive environment.*

- Brainspotting (BSP) • Eye Movement Desensitization and Reprocessing (EMDR) • Somatic Experiencing (SE) • Sensorimotor Psychotherapy

## Parts + inner-experience focused

*Explores different parts of self, needs, and inner experiences with curiosity. Connecting with memories and experiences connected to the past that impact our lives today. Many EMDR and Brainspotting therapists also work with parts.*

- Internal Family Systems (IFS) • Parts Work • Emotion Focused Therapy (EFT) • Ego State Therapy

## Relationship + exploration focused

*Focuses on guided exploration of healing and recovery. More room to talk, explore and build understanding through the therapeutic relationship.*

- Rogerian/Person Centered • Relational • Motivational Interviewing • Narrative Therapy

## Insight + interpretation focused

*Explores patterns, relationships, history and meanings that may be outside immediate awareness.*

- Psychodynamic • Psychoanalytic • Gestalt

## Skills + practical support

Focuses on learning, problem solving, and making daily life work better. Can include organizational strategies.

- ADHD Psychoeducation/Coaching • Executive Functioning Support

## Creative + expressive

Uses art, music, movement, drama, play or writing to explore and express what words alone may not reach. Can be a good fit if talking is hard or you think in images.

• Art Therapy • Music Therapy • Drama Therapy • Sandtray • Expressive Writing

## Peer + community support

Support from people with shared lived experience, alongside or instead of individual therapy. Includes peer specialists, support groups and neurodivergent-led communities.

• Certified Peer Specialists • Support Groups • Group Therapy • Neurodivergent-Led Communities

# Finding a Therapist

*Start with 2 or 3 filters. Check the results. Add more only if you need them.*

### Large general directories

• Psychology Today • Zencare • Therapy Den • Headway • Alma

### ADHD-specific

• ND Therapists Directory • Neurodivergent Insights • Neurodiversity Directory • Inclusive Therapists • Neurodiversity Collective

## Scan a profile

- Filter: Use only 2 or 3 filters first. Be sure to include your payment preference (insurance, self-pay, etc.)
- Location: Make sure the therapist can serve your state (especially for telehealth).
- Impression: Notice the photo, video (if available), intro statement. Click to see profile if it feels right.
- Read the full bio. Look for specific mentions of neurodivergence, ADHD, accepting language, experience.
- Compare with your list: does this profile meet your needs and preferences?
- Practicalities: Double-check cost, payment, availability, location and format.

## Neuroaffirming signs

- They talk about ADHD or neurodivergence with respect, not as a character flaw.
- They are willing to adapt communication, pacing, structure or other parts of therapy.
- They make room for accommodation.
- They value collaboration and client choice.
- They do not make being more 'normal' the goal.
- They understand masking, stigma and the effect of environments that do not fit every brain.
- They can receive feedback and change course when something is not helping.

## Consider the five principles of neuroaffirming therapy

**Flexibility.** Therapy adapts to the person. The person does not have to fit a rigid therapy process.

**Lifelong Learning.** A therapist keeps learning, stays curious and does not take an expert approach.

**Acceptance.** Different ways of thinking, communicating, feeling and functioning are respected.

**Advocacy.** Therapy can include accommodation, self-advocacy and attention to barriers,

**Genuineness.** The therapist seems like a real person, you might be able to trust them.

# Reach Out

*Send an email to your selected providers to request a 15-minute consultation via phone or video chat.*

## Ask for a consultation

*Once you have identified 3-5 therapists who you would like to reach out to, it is time to send an email to request a 15-minute video chat or phone call. This conversation should be free, low pressure, and low demand. It will likely feel awkward for both you and the therapist. That is normal.*

### Email Template:

Hi [name],

I saw your profile and it stood out to me because [one thing you noticed]. I'm looking for support with ADHD and [specific issues]. I'd like to schedule a free 15-minute consultation to see if we might be a good fit.

I'm generally available [times/days]. I prefer [phone/video] for the consultation.

Thanks,
[name]
Phone:
Email:

*Once you have identified 3-5 therapists who you would like to reach out to, it is time to send an email to request a 15-minute video chat or phone call. This conversation should be free, low pressure, and low demand. It will likely feel awkward for both you and the therapist. That is normal.*

# Prepare Questions for the Consultation

*Use your Needs and Preferences Table (pg. 4) to develop questions for the therapy consultation.*

## Perspective on ADHD and your unique challenges

*Using your Needs and Preferences Table, develop a question about how the therapist can help you with your particular issues, challenges, and needs.*

**Question 1:**

## Logistical/Practical question

*Develop a question about practical issues like insurance/self-pay/sliding scale, location, times, flexibility, accommodations, etc.*

**Question 2:**

## Other (optional)

*Create a question or two about things that are important to you to develop trust and confidence that this person can help you feel better.*

**Question 3:**

## Establish Next Steps

*Clearly define next steps. If you feel connected to this therapist, consider scheduling an appointment during the consultation. If you want to look at other therapists, confirm how you can follow up to schedule an appointment if you select this therapist later (gather contact information).*

# 2. The Consultation

*The consultation is a time to see if you and the therapist are a good fit. Ask all your prepared questions (pg. 10). Consider probing or pushing back if something doesn't feel right. Be sure to have a copy of your prepared questions and health insurance card available for the interview.*

## Example opening

Thanks for taking the time to meet with me. I'm looking for a therapist and wanted to see if we might be a fit.

### What I want support with

I'm looking for support with ADHD and _____. What is your approach to helping with that?

### Practical fit

Ask about anything important from your NEED list: cost, insurance, schedule, location, telehealth, availability or policies.

### My questions

Review your prepared questions and any that have not been answered.

## Right after

**Write it down within 30 minutes while it's fresh. Use the Therapist Notes Sheet (pg. 13) to document your thoughts if it is helpful.**

- How do I feel after talking with this person?
- More hopeful? Less hopeful? Better? Worse? Something else?
- What might it be like to work with this person for the next few months?
- Can I imagine developing enough trust to show up as more of my whole self?
- Looking back at my needs and preferences, how does this match feel?

# Therapist Notes

**Use one column for each person**

| THERAPIST 1 | THERAPIST 2 | THERAPIST 3 |
|---|---|---|
| Name + what stood out | Name + what stood out | Name + what stood out |
| Consultation notes | Consultation notes | Consultation notes |
| How I felt afterward | How I felt afterward | How I felt afterward |
| Needs + preferences | Needs + preferences | Needs + preferences |
| Next step | Next step | Next step |

# 3. After the Consultation

*Reach out to your selected therapist to start therapy via email or phone call.*

Take a few minutes to reflect on how you felt. Look back at your needs and preferences. Review the notes you took on each therapist. Follow your intuition and choose someone to try, knowing you can choose someone else later.

- Keep the information for your second or third choices. If the first therapist does not work out, you can use your notes to connect with another therapist.

## Email Template:

Hi [name],

Thanks again for meeting with me. I'd like to move forward with starting therapy. Can you let me know the next steps for scheduling and paperwork?

How I'll be funding therapy: [insurance, self-pay, sliding scale, etc.]

Thanks,
[name]
Phone:
Email:

# Your First Appointment

*The first appointment may start off awkward but will likely be more comfortable as it progresses. You may have anxiety and feel nervous prior to the appointment. This is normal.*

## Before you go

- Feeling anxious, awkward or mixed about the first appointment is normal.
- You do not have to get rid of those feelings. Go with the flow and give it a try.
- Treat the first appointment like an experiment. See how it goes.
- There is no right way to prepare. The therapist will be able to guide the appointment if needed.
- Bring a list, notes or records if that helps you; bring nothing if it helps you.

## What to expect

- It takes time to get used to someone and build rapport.
- You can show up as authentically as you can today. You do not have to tell your whole story at once.
- The first appointment is often an intake. Expect some paperwork, questions about your history, a psychosocial assessment and discussion of a treatment plan.
- Some therapy may happen, but the first session often feels different from later sessions.
- It is fine to just show up and let the therapist guide the session.

## Remember

- You always have a choice.
- One appointment does not commit you to continuing.
- You can ask for a break, use the bathroom, decline something, end a session early or decide not to come back.

# Therapy Fit Check-In

After about 4 or 5 sessions, reflect on your experiences in the therapy sessions you have attended. Is this going well for you?

## Notice the direction

- How am I feeling overall?
- What is happening with the issue that brought me to therapy?
- Am I noticing improvement, relief or more hope?
- If change is slow, do I still feel optimistic about where we are going?
- Does it feel stagnant or like things are getting worse?

## Notice the relationship

- Is trust developing?
- Can I open up at least somewhat?
- Can I take the mask off a little more?
- Do I feel more spaciousness, relief, freedom or ability to be myself?
- Do I feel safe enough to disagree or give feedback?

## Feedback matters

- Tell the therapist what is helping and what is not.
- Notice how the therapist responds to feedback, do they adjust and make meaningful changes if needed?
- If talking in person feels too hard, communicate another way and bring it back into the session when you can.
- Remember that self-advocacy and communication are part of therapy.

## If therapy feels worse

- Feeling worse does not always mean therapy is going badly. Difficult feelings can increase while working through trauma or painful material.
- At the same time, fear of the therapist, repeated shutdown, coercion, discrimination, serious boundary problems or ethical concerns are reasons to be concerned about your services.
- You do not owe a therapist an attempt at repair before leaving. You always have the right to stop.

## How do you want to proceed?

- Keep going as is,
- Meet more often or less often.
- Change the format when possible.
- Ask to try a different approach.

- Talk about what is not working and reset the relationship.
- Ask for a referral or choose another therapist.
- Take a break or finish therapy.
- Try another kind of support in addition to or in place of therapy.

# Resources

**CHADD**
chadd.org
ADHD information and a professional directory.

**ADDitude Magazine**
additudemag.com
Articles and practical information about ADHD.

**Divergent Therapy**
divergenttherapy.org
For more information or to have a consultation with Jesse Jonesberg, MSW, LCSW, CPS. 414.306.5068

## A note about ADHD stigma

ADHD stigma is real. Disbelief, stereotypes about laziness or effort, and assumptions about medication can make asking for help harder with ADHD. You do not have to prove your ADHD or defend your need for support in therapy.

## Mental Health Crisis Phone Contacts

| | |
|---|---|
| **988** | Suicide & Crisis Lifeline: free, confidential service available nationwide for anyone experiencing mental health-related distress, thoughts of suicide, or substance use concerns |
| **Text HOME to: 741741** | Crisis Text Line: connect with a crisis counselor over text |
| **414.257.7222** | Milwaukee Mobile Crisis: 24/7 team of Milwaukee-based counselors, psychologists, and nurses who can provide on-site assessments and help stabilize a mental health crisis in the community |
| **414-966-3030** | Mental Health Emergency Center (MHEC): visit the Mental Health Emergency Center physically for 24/7 psychiatric emergency department care tailored for adults and adolescents in Milwaukee County |

# Selected Bibliography

### Research connected to this toolkit

This is a selected reading list, not a complete review of ADHD treatment research.


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