

## Tips on finding a psychologist for help with personal problems

### Background

- Which profession? Therapists come in different guises – clinical psychologists, psychiatrists, psychotherapists, counsellors and more. Psychiatrists train as doctors first and can prescribe medication, so they tend to see people with more serious mental illnesses eg schizophrenia, bipolar.
- Psychologists and psychiatrists are registered and regulated professions, which adds a layer of protection for clients and public. You have to be properly qualified and experienced to use the title. There are excellent practitioners in the other professions but anyone can set up as a counsellor or psychotherapist so you need to be more careful in your search
- Private or NHS? You can get a referral from your GP to see a therapist but there is likely to be a waiting list of several months especially for NHS clinical psychologists
- The remaining tips are intended for people looking for a psychologist in their own area and are based purely on my own opinions and experience

### Resources

- If you're happy to be open about your reasons for seeking help, then seeking recommendations from friends and family is often a good place to start
- You could google "psychologist in yourtown" and see what comes up but you still have to make sure the person is appropriately qualified and registered and right for you, as described below
- When I am asked to find someone for TV contributors or clients, I usually go to the British Psychological Society (BPS) website here: <http://www.bps.org.uk/>

### Searching the BPS database

- Click on the "Find a psychologist" link on the left of the BPS home page
- Click on the "Directory of Chartered Psychologists" link at the top of the list of resources
- Type in your home or work postcode (ignore the "branches" option)
- Select the number of miles you are prepared to travel from the search radius menu. I usually start with a narrow search and widen if necessary
- Select the appropriate description from the "Who is this for" menu. You can leave these options blank but you will get more names in the results
- Choose and select the closest fit in the "What are the issues" section

### Shortlisting

- By now, you should have a list of psychologists and their distance from your postcode. I usually print out the list and use it to make notes, ticks, crosses etc. If the list is too long, you may want to go back and apply more filters

- Depending on the number of filters you applied, the list may include private, NHS, university psychologists etc, some specialising in areas you don't need eg forensic, learning disability
- Click on each name to see who they are and what they do and make notes. If you have a preference for a male or female psychologist, that can be part of your shortlisting strategy. Aim for a shortlist of at least three candidates who deal with issues like yours and work within a reasonable distance of you.
- Telephone each one for a 10-minute conversation (with the named psychologist not a secretary or receptionist) and keep notes eg
  - Can you imagine talking to this person at length and regularly? How did you feel while talking and afterwards?
  - What experience does he/she have dealing with your issue?
  - What does he/she charge per hour? (typical range is £50 to £150 per hour)
  - What is his/her cancellation policy?
  - How soon could he/she see you?
  - How often would the sessions occur?
  - How many sessions would be needed?
  - Does the GP need to be involved in the referral? (usually, no)
- In addition to this initial phone call, most psychologists will allow a chargeable first assessment meeting where you can test out in person, whether the therapist and the approach is right for you, before committing further

Good luck  
Stephen Flett  
Chartered Clinical Psychologist  
April 2016