



# STEPFAMILY FOUNDATION *of* ALBERTA

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## Do We Need Counselling?

### A consumer's guide

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#### **Is there a difference between a therapist and a counsellor?**

No. In general, these terms are used interchangeably.

#### **What do therapists do?**

They diagnose and treat mental and emotional disorders, behavioural problems and relationship difficulties. Therapists are typically interested in strengths, patterns, roles, rules, goals, and stages of development. Depending upon their particular qualifications and training, they may use: interviews, psychological tests, rating scales, hypnosis, reading assignments, discussions, relaxation exercises, homework assignments, reward systems, and many other techniques as appropriate.

#### **Who are qualified therapists?**

The requirements for practice vary somewhat across the different provinces and territories of this country. In general, Canadian therapists have specialized training in counselling; one or more graduate degrees; are licensed by a

professional association to use a professional title (such as: Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Social Worker, etc.), and subscribe to a professional code of ethics. Each of these professional groups undergoes different training and has different skills to offer. With all other things being equal, you should opt for the therapist with more training and experience in treating concerns such as yours. (A doctoral degree represents more training than a Master's degree which, in turn, represents more training than a Bachelor's degree.) Increasingly, qualified therapists in Canada are members of the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) which requires that they possess at least a Master's degree, specific training in marriage and family therapy, and have a minimum of two years of supervised clinical practice. ***Do not hesitate to inquire about a therapist's training and experience.***

### **How often are sessions scheduled?**

One session per week is very common. However, in some situations, sessions are scheduled more frequently; and in others less frequently.

### **How long do sessions last?**

Generally, an introductory session tends to be somewhat longer, but most therapy sessions last about one hour.

### **How long, on average, does therapy last?**

The period of time that an individual, couple or family remains in therapy tends to vary with the seriousness of the problem, but most situations require six sessions or fewer.

### **What if my spouse or family members won't participate?**

Your spouse or other family members do not always need to participate in therapy. However, uninterested family members often ***do*** get involved in the therapy later, if there is at least one motivated person attending.

### **How can I find a qualified therapist?**

Many companies make counselling services available to their employees through employee assistance programs (EAPs). Qualified therapists are also listed in the Yellow Pages under: Psychologists, Social Workers, Counselling and Social Service Agencies. Often times, qualified therapists can be accessed at hospitals, colleges and universities. In addition, you may ask for a referral from your family physician or for a personal recommendation from a friend or colleague. You may also contact the provincial or national association of one of the professional groups listed above, and ask them for the names of several therapists who specialize in concerns such as yours and who live in your community. Finally, there are a number of directories of therapists available on the Internet. [Theravive Therapist Network](#), [Find-A-Therapist](#) and the [Therapist Locator](#) are directories that include listings of therapists in Canada and the United States. They allow you to "search" for therapists in your area who have particular credentials and specialize in a particular area of practice. (Also see this short [video](#).)

### **Do I need a referral from my family physician?**

No, a referral from your physician is generally not essential. However, if you are considering seeing a therapist, do not hesitate to ask your physician for a referral; or for the name of a therapist he/she would recommend.

### **What if I don't feel comfortable with my therapist?**

Good therapists are very aware of the importance of a good "fit" and will invite you to use the first session to decide if you feel comfortable working with them. If, at any time, you don't feel that you have a good fit, ***let your therapist know***. It is likely that he/she will be able to direct you to a more suitable therapist.

### **What does therapy cost and who pays for it?**

Therapists' fees vary considerably depending upon the professional training of the therapist, the area you are living in, the therapist's expertise, etc. Fee guidelines are available for each of the professions noted above from their

respective professional associations. [Click [here](#) for the fee schedule recommended by the Psychologists' Association of Alberta.]

If you have an EAP benefit at your place of employment, your employer will cover all or a portion of your costs. It is important to find out the details of your coverage before securing services.

The services of some therapists, (e.g. Psychiatrists) may be covered by your general (e.g. Alberta) Health Care Insurance. Some funded agencies provide counselling services without passing on any of the costs to you. In this province, the Probation Department, for example, may fund counselling that is ordered by the court.

Many people now possess extended health care insurance which will pay, in full or in part, for the services of a therapist. Blue Cross, for example, requires that the therapist be a Psychologist who is appropriately licensed (i.e., Registered or Chartered). With most of these programs it is necessary to pay the fees as you go and submit a receipt to the insurance company to claim your benefit. Again, it is important to be certain of the details before contracting services.

Some agencies use a "sliding scale" which usually means that the portion of the total fee you pay is determined by your income.

**For more information or an appointment contact:**

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