



Quick Steps

Information to Help Your Stepfamily Thrive

Finding a Stepfamily Therapist

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If you're looking for a therapist for your stepfamily and live in an area that isn't represented on our referral list of therapists who have special expertise in working with stepfamilies, these guidelines may help you find a professional to fit your family's needs.

1. Ask for a referral from a trusted source: your physician, your child's teacher or school counselor, clergy, and/or friends and family. When you don't know where to start, a personal recommendation can be a big help.
2. See if your community has a resource and referral help-line. These organizations have extensive information about a variety of resources available in your community.
3. Check with local agencies that provide support and assistance for families.
4. Look online. There are a growing number of online referral directories that provide information about therapists, their credentials and areas of specialization.
5. If you have a university in your community, check with the departments of counseling psychology, social work and human development and family studies. Many of them have excellent student training clinics open to the public.
6. Interview potential therapists before scheduling your first appointment. Some therapists will offer a brief appointment at no charge to help you determine if it's a good fit for everyone. Some therapists work primarily with individuals, others with couples and others yet with families. Some specialize in working with adults while others specialize in children. These are all things you will want to know as you make your decision about who is the best therapist for you and your stepfamily.
7. Inquire about credentials. Is this therapist licensed and in good standing in his/her particular discipline? There are many disciplines from which people become therapists – social work, psychology, psychiatry, marriage and family therapy, and psychiatric nursing to name a few. Each has its own rigorous training and standards.
8. Ask about training and coursework they've had in stepfamily dynamics and working with stepfamilies. This is a specialized field of study with its own body of information and best practices. Your family will likely be best served by a professional who understands the ins and outs of stepfamily life.
9. Ask if their treatment plan for stepfamilies differs from first families. If yes, ask them to describe what is different and why. One size definitely does not fit all when working with stepfamilies. Ideally, the therapist you are interviewing will be able to articulate the differences.
10. Can he or she recommend resources for you? Ask about books, articles, websites etc. that can provide you with additional information. If the therapist you are interviewing is experienced in working with stepfamilies, he or she will be able to point you in the direction of good resources.
11. Talk with your therapist if you think the therapeutic process isn't working. Share your concerns and listen to what the therapist has to say. If you remain unsatisfied, find a new therapist.

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