Starting Therapy

YOUTH MOVE MASSACHUSETTS

Step 1

Determine if you are in crisis.
You might be thinking, "I should find someone to talk to about the things going on in my life and the stuff I struggle with." If that's the case, finding a therapist might be a good idea. But if you're feeling so alone, angry, sad, or upset that you might be a danger to yourself or someone else, you may be in crisis.

Crisis is not the time to find a therapist. A crisis is the time to seek immediate help. Find an adult you trust and tell them what's going on.

Step 2

Identify what you need.
Think about the particular situation you're in. What's contributing to your desire for a therapist – your relationships, stuff at school, certain behaviors you've picked up? Look for a therapist who specializes in what you're dealing with.

Remember to think about how far you're willing to travel to see this person. Think about how frequently you'll visit and how you'll be getting there.

Step 3

Learn about treatment orientations.
Experience matters. Different mental health professionals have different ways of approaching the people they work with (that's what we mean by treatment orientation). This means a lot about the way the therapist you choose will build a relationship with you. Some styles aren't going to be comfortable for you, and that's okay.

Step 4

Trust your gut.
You might do a bunch of research, find someone you think will be great, and then figure out when you meet them that you two do not connect. If you feel uncomfortable with the therapist or feel like they don't have time for you or don't care, look for someone else.

Step 5

When you find the right person, be honest.
Don't waste your time and money if you're not going to take it seriously. The therapist is there to help you!



©Youth MOVE Massachusetts RV 2026

What Do All These Letters Mean?

Professionals go to school for a long time to get some alphabet soup added to the end of their signature. Here's what some of it means:

PhD or PsyD: This usually indicates that the person is a psychologist. They're experts on the mind and behavior. They can't prescribe medicine, but they should be good at helping you understand why you perceive things the way you do.

MD: You probably recognize this one. This person is a medical doctor. If they specialize in psychology, they're typically called a psychiatrist. They can prescribe medicine.

MSW: This is a social worker. A social worker provides social services in a health setting. They're usually pretty empathetic, meaning they'll try to understand how you're feeling at any given time.

LICSW: This is the highest level of social work in MA. They are trained in clinical therapy, psychotherapy, and case management.

LPC or LMHC: This is the standard counseling license in MA. This person will have at least a master's degree in counseling and a certification from the state in which they work.

Myths and Misconceptions About Seeking Therapy

"Therapy is for crazy people."
Therapy is for people who realize they need some help. That's not crazy.

"**Therapy is for girls."** There are no rules about who can or can't get help from a therapist, end of story.

"Therapy is for people who aren't smart enough to figure out their own problems."
A therapist doesn't just tell you what to do. They encourage you to act on your own.

"Going to therapy is a sign of weakness." It's actually exactly the opposite – going to therapy takes guts. It can demand a lot from you, emotionally and otherwise.

"You can't go to therapy unless there's something really wrong with you."
There are all sorts of therapists who specialize in all sorts of stuff. What you need a therapist for will be completely different from what someone else needs.

"If I go to therapy, everything will get fixed immediately." It takes time to work through the junk life throws at us. Be willing to take as much time as you need.

Signs You Might Need a New Therapist

- You feel manipulated or overly vulnerable.
- The therapist doesn't pay attention while you're speaking.
- The therapist doesn't give you enough time to talk.
- You aren't allowed to look at your own records.
- The therapist isn't sensitive to your culture or religion.
- You feel ridiculed or criticized.
- The therapist makes decisions for you.
- The therapist seems overwhelmed by you.
- The therapist doesn't help you create goals.

PPAL
Parent/Professional Advocacy League, Inc.
www.ppal.net

Youth MOVE Massachusetts is a program of PPAL

©Youth MOVE Massachusetts RV 2026