



Finding a Good Counselor

The following material is adapted from Dr. Mark Laaser's excellent book, *Healing the Wounds of Sexual Addiction*.

To have a therapist who is knowledgeable about sexual addiction is critical. However, finding one may be difficult. A Christian counselor trained in sexual addiction is the ideal choice, but unfortunately, such professionals are quite rare. Because more resources are available to provide spiritual support, look first for a clinician who understands sexual addiction. If that person is also a Christian, that's a plus. No ethical counselor will do anything to challenge your faith, and someone who does not understand sexual addiction can do more harm than good. Here are some suggestions about how to find a counselor:

1. Ask other recovering people in your support group for recommendations.
2. Ask other mental health professionals for counselors trained in sexual addiction.
3. Check the listing of therapists who are members of the National Council on Sexual Addiction and Compulsivity (www.ncsac.org).
4. For specifically Christian resources, check the listing of therapists who are members of an organization like the American Association of Christian Counselors (www.aacc.net). (Understand that this is a general listing and includes pastors and lay people, not just professional therapists.) Even if a person has clinical training, an AACC member may not be familiar with sexual addiction.

It's wise to interview therapists to see if they seem to be an appropriate choice. Here are some questions to ask:

1. Are you trained in treating addictions?
2. What degrees do you have, and in what fields?*
3. Are you specifically familiar with sexual addiction?
4. Have you heard of Dr. Patrick Carnes?
5. Do you work from a trauma-based model in treating addictions?
6. How many sexually addicted clients have you treated?
7. What's your definition of sexual sobriety?
8. What's your experience in helping sexual co-addicts?
9. What about couples? How do you work with them?

* Professionals can have a variety of educational backgrounds and practice emphases. Below is a brief synopsis of the more common ones.

Counseling Degrees

Be sure to ask what field is represented by the degree. For example, some may have a Ph.D. in history and refer to themselves as “Dr.” but that title and degree has nothing to do with qualifications to practice psychotherapy.

Doctoral Degree

These clinicians have achieved the most advanced level of education available, which is usually signified by the initials Ph.D., Ed.D., or Psy.D.

Master’s Degree

These clinicians have completed a graduate degree, usually identified as a M.A., M.S., or M.F.T.

Types of Counselors

Psychiatrist

This person is a medical doctor who has completed advanced training in mental and emotional disorders. A psychiatrist may prescribe medication and is typically more focused on managing medication than on providing talk therapy.

Psychologist

This person has a doctoral degree but isn’t medically trained. He or she may be specifically trained in testing but will also conduct traditional therapy.

Licensed Professional

These clinicians have at least a master’s degree and have completed supervision requirements for licensure in their field. Different types include:

- **Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist**
These individuals have specifically trained in marriage and family therapy; they view individuals in the context of their relationships.
- **Licensed Professional Counselor**
These people have met their states’ requirement to be licensed as a counselor. They can be at either a master’s degree or a Ph.D. level. This involved taking a licensure exam and demonstrating a certain amount of supervised counseling hours.
- **Licensed Clinical Social Worker**

Similarly, these people have met either state or national standards to be licensed as social workers. They can specialize in a variety of mental health areas, including marriage and family counseling. Therefore, a license in this field can mean a variety of areas of competence. One should always be careful to investigate what areas of expertise the LCSW is competent in, such as addiction.

- **Licensed Pastoral Counselor**

These counselors have met the requirements of one of several pastoral counseling organizations, involving varying amounts of education, training and supervision. This is not the same as a state licensure but does constitute demonstrated proficiency in pastoral counseling. Many of these organizations provide training in areas of marriage and family counseling that would be similar to those of an LPC or an LCSW.

Unlicensed Counselor

This person is either a trained counselor who for whatever reason hasn't completed the requirements for licensure, or a lay counselor or minister who doesn't have professional clinical training.