

# Help is out there: A guide to choosing a therapist

BY HERON

**D**oes your heart sink every time you even think about the holidays? Do you dread facing homophobic Uncle Henry? Does your holiday menu include lots of unresolved issues? Do you really need to suffer through it alone?

No. Many services are available to help you make it through hard times or maybe even improve your whole outlook on life. And because Portland has such a huge gay and lesbian population, many of those services are designed especially for us.

Many people turn some shade of blue during the holidays, while others wade through Seasonal Affective Disorder, appropriately known as SAD. If you suspect your depression is triggered by gray winter weather and decreasing daylight, check out the special clinic at Oregon Health Sciences University, where much pioneering research has been done on the subject.

Or are you seriously depressed? Depression is so common in our society, it's called the common cold of mental illness.

But depression can be life threatening—if your thoughts are turning toward suicide, get help immediately. Any area emergency room

can provide immediate assessment and get you set up with services.

Fortunately, depression is treatable. A psychiatrist or a specially prepared nurse practitioner can prescribe antidepressants that can improve your mood by altering your brain chemistry.

So, before you throw yourself off a bridge, get help. However, rarely will a psychiatrist have time to explore your issues, such as how to cope with your brother George's habit of trying to save your soul over Thanksgiving dinner. Most so-called talk therapy is done by counselors.

What can you expect from a counselor? Counselors can help you understand yourself and others. They can help you gain insight, recognize repeated patterns in your life, develop coping mechanisms and become a happier person.

**P**ortland counselor Mary Beth Haines, Ph.D., M.A., offers some advice on finding a therapist. She works with the Gay Men's Counseling Service.

Haines suggests asking a trusted friend or co-worker to recommend someone. She points out that whatever your problem, you are probably not alone, and you might be surprised to find others

around you have been through similar times.

"Holidays are the hardest times for all of us," Haines says. "Holidays often bring us in contact with families and religious institutions that may not be supportive of our queer lives."

Women's Therapy Northwest, located in Portland, has prepared a membership directory, *A Guide for Women and Men Seeking Therapy*. This free book lists 109 local counselors as well as their qualifications, areas of interest, theoretical orientation and prices.

The directory is available at area stores and restaurants. To find one near you, call 503-756-3248.

Many periodicals, including *Just Out*, contain large sections of ads from therapists, which can be a good starting place.

For such an important decision, consider auditioning counselors. Many therapists offer a free first consultation and often mention that in their ads.

It's a great way to evaluate your comfort level

with talking candidly to a stranger. If you decide against a particular therapist, do tell them why and ask for their referrals. They want a good match as much as you do, and they often can suggest a colleague better suited to your issues.

Ask yourself what kind of feedback you want: someone who talks a lot and gives plenty of suggestions and/or advice; or perhaps you really just want someone to listen while you vent; or is it sympathy you really seek? If so, you might be better off crying on a friend's shoulder, as counselors are by their nature trained to help you "fix" your problem.

At your first meeting, be prepared to ask a lot of questions. Therapists use stunningly diverse methods to counsel.

**It is startling and important to note that Oregon law does not require licensing for people offering counseling services, although many colleges statewide offer degrees in counseling.**

Go to that first meeting ready with a list of your concerns.

How does the therapist propose to help you? How long should you expect to wait to see results? Will you do all or most of the talking?

One therapist I explored for this article includes Gestalt, hypnotherapy, mindfulness, Jin Shin Jyutsu and artwork as her theoretical orientation. Another

lists contemporary rational psychoanalytic psychotherapy, movement desensitization and reprocessing. Whew! Before agreeing to open your wallet and your wounded heart to anyone, you owe it to yourself to know what to expect.

A big problem in psychotherapy are clients who fail to advocate for themselves. Ethical counselors agree you should be in control of your own therapy. Haines suggests two to four meetings before you decide to change therapists unless, of course, you hate them immediately.

"It's important to find a good fit," she explains. If you are not satisfied, say so. "Stand up for yourself if it's not working, but call and let them know if you are not coming back, out of courtesy," she recommends.

Keep in mind, though, you will be starting over from scratch with someone new.

Should you seek out a gay or lesbian therapist? If the therapist's gender or orientation is important to you, you might be on your own in paying the bill.

Your insurance might limit who you can see and might not have a gay or lesbian counselor available or might be unwilling to offer that information. Kaiser Permanente, for example, will allow you to seek a therapist by gender but declines to divulge a therapist's orientation. However, Kaiser does offer some specifically queer group therapy.

And, yes, in this computer age, you even

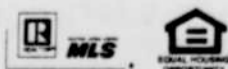
## The following is a list of degrees and credentials included in *A Guide for Women and Men Seeking Therapy*:

|            |  |                |   |
|------------|--|----------------|---|
| A.C.S.     | Approved Clinical Supervisor                   | M.F.C.C.       | Marriage, Family, Child Counselor - California                      |
| A.C.S.W.   | Academy of Clinical Social Workers             | M.F.T.         | Marriage, Family Therapist - California                             |
| A.D.T.R.   | Academy of Dance Therapists, Registered        | M.P.S.         | Master of Personal Studies Degree                                   |
| A.T.R.     | Registered Art Therapist                       | M.P.W.         | Master of Process Work  |
| B.C.D.     | Board Certified Diplomate (Social Work)        | M.R.E.T.       | Master Rapid Eye Technician   |
| C.A.D.C.   | Certified Alcohol/Drug Counselor               | M.S.           | Master of Science Degree  |
| C.C.M.H.C. | Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselor     | M.S.W.         | Master of Social Work Degree  |
| C.G.P.     | Certified Group Psychotherapist                | M.S.W.A.C.     | Master of Social Work, Addictions Counseling                        |
| C.H.T.     | Certified Hakomi Therapy                       | N.A.C.C.M.H.C. | National Association of Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselors |
| C.M.H.C.   | Certified Mental Health Counselor - Washington | N.A.C.F.T.     | National Academy of Certified Family Therapists                     |
| C.S.W.     | Certified Social Worker - Washington           | N.C.C.         | National Certified Counselor  |
| C.S.W.A.   | Clinical Social Work Associate                 | N.D.           | Naturopathic Doctor   |
| L.C.S.W.   | Licensed Clinical Social Worker - Oregon       | P.A.C.         | Certified Physician's Assistant                                     |
| L.M.F.T.   | Licensed Marriage, Family Therapist - Oregon   | Ph.D.          | Licensed Clinical Psychologist - Oregon, Washington, California     |
| L.M.T.     | Licensed Massage Therapist - Oregon            | PM.H.N.P.      | Psychiatric Mental Health Practitioner - Oregon                     |
| L.P.A.     | Licensed Psychology Associate                  | Psy.D.         | Licensed Doctorate of Psychology                                    |
| L.P.C.     | Licensed Professional Counselor - Oregon       | R.N.           | Registered Nurse - Oregon   |
| M.A.       | Master of Arts Degree                          | R.N.C.S.       | Registered Nurse Clinical Specialist                                |
| M.A.C.     | Master Addictions Counselor                    | R.P.T.-S.      | Registered Play Therapist - Supervisor                              |
| M.Div.     | Master of Divinity Degree                      | R.S.W.         | Registered Social Worker - Washington                               |
| M.Ed.      | Master of Education Degree                     |                |   |

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