

## Top 10 Questions to ask a Mental Health Professional



The decision to seek counseling for yourself or your child is an important one. But the search for a therapist with expertise in the area of higher conflict divorce/separation issues can be confusing. Parents sometimes feel embarrassed by the questions they have about counseling.

Please remember that counseling is a service you purchase. No service is useful if it is inconvenient, too costly to use, or the provider lacks expertise. Counselors specialize in many areas – make sure that if you are struggling through a higher conflict custody battle that you choose someone who specializes in that area.

Below I have listed a series of questions that I recommend you ask a potential therapist before starting in counseling (or at the first session). Doing so will help you to avoid starting a counseling relationship only to realize that the therapist doesn't specialize in your area of need.

1. Are you a licensed mental health professional? How long have you been in practice? Have they ever been disciplined by their licensing board? If so for what?
2. Do you abide by the standards of practice set out by the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts in *Guidelines for Court Involved Therapists*?
3. What percentage of your practice involves family law cases?
4. Are you trained in collaborative law, private mediation, or parent coordination? Are you a member of the Association of Family and Conciliation Courts, the Association for Conflict Resolution?
5. What is your approach to practice? (Note to parent - all counselors have a philosophical approach that will impact on the way you receive services. Some therapists work from a behavioral perspective, others may be psychodynamic, or perhaps cognitive. Ask the person to explain their orientation and see if what they offer sounds like a good fit to for you.
6. Are your services available during the week? During business hours? Evenings? Week-ends? What kind of crisis support is available and when -

during business hours or 24 hours?

7. Is the office in a safe area - on a well-lit street? Is the parking area well-lit and safe?
8. What is the counselor's hourly rate - what is the average hourly rate for a therapy hour in the area? Is there different fee structure for written reports and court appearances?
9. What types of insurance do you take?
10. What will you expect from me?

**Note to parents about Dual Relationships**

No responsible or ethical mental health professional will agree to see you as a client if you already have a relationship with that person. Also no responsible or ethical therapist will try to start any additional relationship with you while you are a client.