

Advocacy Tips for Sexual Abuse Survivors OR Finding & Keeping a Caregiver

Finding a Provider

- Identify specific qualities that are important to you in a caregiver (e.g., gender, sexual orientation, physical location, fee, office hours, etc.)
- Whenever possible, get a referral thru friends, a trusted professional, or a reliable service agency
- Make a list of screening criteria or questions to use during your initial contacts with the caregiver
 - don't just rely on your memory: write down your criteria or questions – this will allow you to maintain mindful awareness & to be a better listener during your initial contacts with the caregiver
 - Check out:
 - fees, hours for appointments, and any concerns regarding insurance or self-pay
 - how the caregiver would handle any emergency that might arise between appointments. (This is a very important question to ask: even if you don't anticipate emergencies, do not deny the reality that emergencies do occur and it is better to know in advance how such situations may be handled.)
- It's O.K. to interview more than one caregiver before selecting the person you want to work with

Things to Consider in Deciding Whether to Continue Working With a Caregiver

After your initial appointment(s), make notes about your interactions with the caregiver

- What made you feel good?
- Was there anything that bothered you?
- How did the provider act or react in the initial interview(s) – the things the provider said or didn't say, did or didn't do, will give you clues as to what it might be like to work with this person
- Use your notes to reflect on the following considerations:
 - DO I LIKE THIS CAREGIVER AS A PERSON?
 - Do I feel like I was treated with respect by him/her?
 - Was the caregiver proactive in checking out boundary concerns and/or did they honor any boundary requests I expressed?
 - Do I feel like I was listened to?
 - Do I feel like I was understood in addition to being listened to?
 - Was the caregiver sensitive to what I need and to my feelings?
 - Did the caregiver help me to feel at ease?
 - Did the caregiver allow an opportunity for me to share anything about my abuse history that might be relevant to their delivery of treatment services to me?
 - Did I feel safe with this person?
 - Do I feel the caregiver demonstrated competency and confidence in whatever services they provided to me?
 - Did the caregiver disclose any information about limitations in treatment services they could provide? If so, did they discuss how they would handle any limitations in services?
 - Did the caregiver exhibit traits of flexibility or did they seem rigid and authoritarian?

A Therapist or Counselor Who Exhibits the Following Traits Will Increase the Likelihood for a Positive And Productive Healing Experience:

- Creates safety for you to share your personal narrative
- Is able to address the larger context of your life vs. maintaining a singular focus on your abuse
- Has experience working with sexual trauma
- Demonstrates clinical maturity – e.g., can tolerate hearing details of your life narrative & your feelings
- Reflects the full range of your feelings – i.e., does not favor either positive or negative feelings
- Maintains a balance between focusing on you & on other significant people/activities in you life
- Facilitates your freedom of choice concerning issues of reconciliation & forgiveness
- Adheres to professional boundaries by not participating in a friendship with you outside of therapy
- Uses your therapy time to talk about you & your issues, not his or her personal problems or history
- Adheres to professional boundaries by not wanting to have a sexual relationship with you, now or at any future time
- Respects & encourages your ability to say “no” as necessary within the therapeutic relationship
- Is willing to address – directly & openly – any problems that may occur in the therapy relationship
- Encourages you to build a support network outside therapy so as not to rely solely on the therapist
- Encourages you to develop contact with other survivors or with survivor support organizations
- Teaches you skills for problem-solving, advocacy, & self-care

The Following Questions May Help You to Evaluate Whether Your On-Going Relationship With a Caregiver is an Effective Match:

- Do I feel my caregiver listens to me?
- Do I feel my caregiver believes what I report to him or her?
- Do I feel my caregiver respects my ideas, feelings, feedback, & viewpoints?
- Do I get a clear feeling that my caregiver genuinely (vs. just professionally) likes me?
- Do I feel that my caregiver is invested in clients getting better, that s/he is working to support my independence (vs. keeping me dependent on him/her), & that s/he believes in my capacity to heal?
- Does my caregiver encourage & support me to utilize other resources for my healing?
- Do I believe in the competency of my caregiver & do I trust him or her?
- Does my caregiver solicit my consent surrounding treatment procedures?
- Is my caregiver respectful of personal boundaries?
- Does my caregiver respond adequately when I am in crisis or need special assistance?
- Is my caregiver willing & open to address any problems that may have arisen between us?
- Do I feel that I am making progress since I began working with this caregiver?

If a Caregiver Does Any of the Following, You May Decide NOT to Continue Working With Him or Her:

- minimizes your pain or your experience
- indicates to you (directly or indirectly) that children are responsible for their abuse
- discounts or dismisses memories of your abuse
- focuses on the abuser more than on your abuse
- uses sessions to talk about his or her personal problems or makes inappropriate self-disclosures
- encourages you to be dependent on them & discourages you from seeking other resources
- forces you to do anything you do or do not want to do
- cannot admit they have made a mistake if that should occur while providing services to you
- is not willing to discuss problems that may come up between you & him/her
- initiates or consents to be your friend outside the boundaries of your professional relationship

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