

LGBTQ+ Therapist Screening Guide

Think about finding a therapist as hiring someone to work for you. The therapist's job is to serve your mental health and healing needs, and screening prospective therapists helps you make sure they can do the job you are hiring them to do.

Screening prospective therapists helps you make sure they can do the job you are hiring them to do.

Questions to Ask - Screening Inquiry

Many therapists are willing to set up a free phone interview, where you can spend 15–30 minutes asking them questions and determining if you would like to set up a first appointment with them. Some therapists offer a free first in-person session, in order for you to ask questions and get to know them. Have a list of questions prepared ahead of time and consider taking notes during your conversation, so you have something to review later on when you are making your decision.

Here are some questions you may want to ask (as they are applicable to you):

How long have you been in practice? _____

What is your approach to therapy (in general)? _____

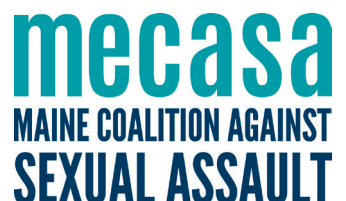
Have you had an specialized training for sexual assault survivors or working with LGBTQ+ identified folks? _____

What experience have you had working with LGBTQ+ survivors of trauma? _____



Maine's sexual assault support centers: Supporting people of all gender identities and sexual orientations.

mecasa.org



What experience have you have working with substance abuse/misuse, disordered eating or self-harm?

What specific trauma treatment tools are you trained in (and use)? [Ask them to describe any you aren't familiar with.] _____

Are you willing to work with my physician, pastor or other support/ healing team? _____

If I were in crisis, would I be able to reach you? How do you handle crises? _____

Have you ever worked with sex workers or people who engage in survival sex? _____

How do you involve key family members, partner(s) or friends? Can I bring my partner or family members into therapy with me? _____

Do you work with your clients to design therapeutic goals and treatment plans? _____

How and when will my progress be assessed? _____

Do you prescribe medication? Do you work with someone who does? _____

How long is a typical session? _____

How often will we meet? _____

Self-Reflection Checklist

First Impressions (check all that apply):

- I felt heard—the therapist listened to my questions.
- I understood the responses the therapist gave to my questions—they provided ample detail.
- The therapist asked good questions (they were appropriate and not too invasive) and listened to my responses.
- My gender/gender identity/gender expression were affirmed and respected.
- My sexual orientation/relationship structures/sexual practices and kinks were affirmed and respected.
- I didn't have to educate the therapist about my gender and they did not focus too much of our time on these issues.
- The conversation didn't feel rushed; I was able to ask the questions that most mattered to me.
- I could see the provider took steps to create a safer environment.
- The provider shared their approach to working with clients.
- The provider is clinically qualified to work with the concerns I am bringing to therapy.
- I felt reasonably comfortable.
- I was treated with respect.
- I felt believed.
- We discussed payment options (insurance, self- or co-pay) and I feel comfortable with the arrangement.
- I am able to afford this therapist (my insurance covers them, or their sliding scale is within my budget).
- I am able to easily travel to their office.

Accessing Free or Low Cost Options

If you are working with an advocate from a sexual assault agency, they are a great resource for referrals to a community mental health services, which often have low cost options. Additionally, those advocates may also know of resources such as a Victim Compensation Fund which may be accessible for mental health services.

Some schools, colleges, and universities have on-campus mental health services that are often free to students. Although these options may not provide you with the most trauma or LGBTQ+ focused care, the cost and convenience may be helpful for the short term.

Free and low cost options are not plentiful and often do have substantial limitations, such as a fixed number of sessions, possibly lesser trained therapists, or no choice in which therapist you see. Although these options may initially seem to be positive choices—and, for many they are!—consider the amount of emotional investment you might be making with a therapist who you may not be able to see for the long-run or who might not be the most trained/skilled.

To see if you can access public health insurance, contact Consumers for Affordable Healthcare. They are the main agency in Maine for getting enrolled in federal or state-funded health insurance: www.mainecahc.org.

On-Going Assessment

If you do begin work with a therapist, keep in mind that throughout the course of working with a therapist, you can continually assess and re-assess your comfort, the usefulness, and the level of support and respect you are receiving. Revisit your “First Impressions Checklist” and check in on how things are feeling.

If your therapist is expecting you to train them on LGBTQ issues, you have a right to request that they gain education on their own time. Local LGBTQ advocacy and training agencies such as the Health Equity Alliance, Equality Maine, GLSEN, other youth supporting programs are available to train clinicians. It is appropriate for a therapist to ask clarifying questions or questions that relate to achieving your healing goals, but you will know when it crosses a line to the point of using your time to talk about topics that are for their education vs. your healing.

Everyone will want and need something different out of their therapeutic relationship. If you aren't getting what's most important to you—reduction of distressing symptoms, new coping skills, respect, warmth or compassion, or other therapeutic goals—you may want to find another therapist. If you feel an overall positive impression from your time with a therapist and if you feel you are gaining from the interaction, you will likely want to continue.

Know Your Rights!

Ideally, you can talk directly with your therapist about whatever concerns you have. Sometimes a therapist's conduct is inappropriate or there is an administrative problem that you may want or need to submit feedback about. Most agency-based mental health offices have formal complaint and grievance processes, which you can access.

You do have a right to be treated fairly and without bias. You have a right to receive care at a reasonable and fair cost. You have a right to be treated with respect.

Regulatory Board Administrative Complaint Procedures: www.maine.gov/pfr/professionallicensing/board_complaint.html