



Finding a Therapist:

You Deserve Care from an LGBTQ-Affirming Provider

The Need

For many of us, mental health services help to support our health and stability. LGBTQ people not only face the usual life struggles that bring people to therapy, but also experience stress because of homophobia and transphobia.

We deserve to have providers who treat us with respect, have experience providing LGBTQ-affirming care, and take initiative to continue their learning so that they can provide us with the best possible care.

Hiring your LGBTQ-affirming Therapist

Your therapist works for *you*. For anyone doing any other job on your behalf, you would interview them--and you can (and should) interview your potential therapist.

Here are some questions you may want to ask:

- How long have you been in practice?
- What experience do you have in working with [LGB, trans/transgender, queer, intersex, polyamorous, asexual, kink, etc.] people?
- Are you able to support me as I explore my experiences as an LGBTQ person [of color, of faith, from another culture, etc.]?
- What background do you have working with people with my experience [people living with HIV, survivors of violence, sex workers, substance users, people with eating disorders, etc.]?
- If needed, will you work as a team with my general practitioner, social worker, faith leader, and/or my other care professionals?
- What experience do you have working with a family or relationship like mine? (If you are seeking family or couples counseling.)
- What expertise do you have working with the issue I'm coming to therapy for [depression, anxiety, grief, sexual orientation/gender identity exploration, gender transition, relationship concerns, etc.]?
- Do you provide and have experience writing letters for hormone therapy and/or other gender-affirming medical care? What are your requirements for writing those letters?
- How will you interact with me if we run into each other in public? (This is especially important if you live in a small town or are part of a small LGBTQ community.)

You Deserve Affirming Care

As a community we have experienced rejection and discrimination, therefore we may feel satisfied if a provider is simply nice to us. There is a difference, however, between “typical” or “non-rejecting” care and “affirming” care. You deserve affirming care that is culturally informed and LGBTQ-specific.

“Typical Care”

“I’ve never heard that term. What does genderqueer mean?”

“It sounds like your relationship is really complicated.”

“I like working with LGBT people.”

“I had problem with your pronouns in the beginning, too.”

Affirming Care We Deserve

“I’ve heard people use the term genderqueer. What does it mean for you?”

“I admit, I’m not familiar with working with polyamorous people, and I should be. I’m going to seek education so I can better support you.”

“I’ve been specializing in transgender care for the past 10 years.”

“That must have been really painful for you to be misgendered”

The Respect You Should Expect From Providers

Your provider should not:

- Focus on your sexual orientation or gender identity, unless that is why you sought care
- Assume that you are (or should be) straight, cisgender, or monogamous
- Assume that a negative experience made you LGBTQ
- Ask unnecessary and invasive questions about your body
- Expect you to educate them about LGBTQ identities, cultures, and experiences
- Expect or encourage you to have a personal, physical, or sexual relationship with them

Something to Remember: Providers are not perfect. You can question their observations and let them know if something is not working for you. You are the expert of your own life and your therapist is a tool for change, not a director for change.