

What to Look For in a Therapist

Some therapists are better at treating OCD, BDD or Trich than others. It is important to ask the therapists questions to find out if they know how to do Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) therapy well enough to treat OCD or BDD (ERP is the specific type of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy that is used for these two disorders) or Habit Reversal Training (HRT) for Trich. Their responses to your questions are a good guide to what you want to know about a new therapist. If he or she is guarded, won't give information, only has a couple of one day workshops in training, has not had much training in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) or becomes angry at your requests for information, then you should probably look elsewhere.

If the therapist appreciates how important a decision this is for you and is open, friendly, and knowledgeable, then you may have a gem of a therapist! Your relationship with the therapist is important, especially since they will be asking you to do things that you find uncomfortable. It is important and perhaps even imperative that you trust this person since as already mentioned you will be doing some difficult tasks to deal with your disorder. **Remember: You have a perfect right to ask these questions. This is your life and health and you need to make an informed choice! Think of it this way, would you go to a doctor or a dentist or a specialist who did not have adequate training? The same rule of thumb applies to professionals in mental health.**

What Should I Ask? The following checklist can help guide your search for the right therapist.

- "What techniques do you use to treat OCD or BDD or Trich?"

Note: *If the therapist is vague about or does not mention Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) or Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) for OCD or BDD, then use caution. If you have Trich, then the therapist should be talking about Habit Reversal Training (HRT) or even possibly Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) which is a newer therapy. If the therapist doesn't mention at least HRT then it may be worthwhile to look elsewhere. Remember these therapies are what the international research says works best for all three disorders.*

- “Do you use Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) to treat OCD or BDD or Habit Reversal Training (HRT) to treat Trich?”

Note: *Be cautious of therapists who say they use CBT, but won't be more specific.*

- “What is your training and background in treating OCD or BDD or Trich?”

Note: *The training of therapists in Ireland is not legislated by the government nor are the terms ‘therapist’ or ‘psychologist’ protected terms by our current legislation. In simple terms, this means anyone, even people with very little or no training, can call themselves a therapist or a psychologist. In the future the government will address this but that is some time away.*

In the meantime, it is important to find out what training the therapist has had (or not had). If your GP or psychiatrist suggests the therapist/psychologist then the person is probably fine.

Also, you could find a registered or accredited (it means the same thing) CBT therapist by looking at the British Association of Behavioral Cognitive Psychotherapists (BABCP) website or the Irish Council of Psychotherapy (ICP) website. Unfortunately, the Psychological Society of Ireland (PSI) does not have a list of CBT therapists.*

This link discusses the level of training a CBT therapist should have:

<http://www.babcp.com/Accreditation/Files/General/Minimum-Training-Standards-V2-0611.pdf>

- “How much of your practice currently involves anxiety disorders?”

Note: *The CBT therapist may not exclusively work with anxiety disorders or even OCD, BDD or Trich but they should have a lot of experience and training in this area of treatment.*

- “ How much of your practice currently involves working with individuals with OCD, BDD or Trich?”

Note: *Same as above*

- “ Do you feel that you have been effective in your treatment with individuals with OCD, BDD or Trich?”

Note: Obviously you want someone who has been successful using CBT with prior clients who have OCD or BDD or Trich. Also, this cannot be the only question that is asked since more information is probably needed to make an informed decision.

- “What is your attitude toward medicine in the treatment of OCD or BDD or Trich?”

Note: If they are negative about medication, then this is a bad sign as research has shown this can be effective with the treatment of OCD or BDD. Medication is recommended in the National Institute of Clinical Health Guidelines (NICE) as part of the treatment for OCD and BDD and this is based on a review of all available research. This information can be found at:

<http://guidance.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/live/10976/29945/29945.pdf>.

For Trich, again current research has found this can be of benefit. Please look at the Trichotillomania Learning Centre for more details. Their ‘Expert Consensus Guidelines’ can be found at: http://www.trich.org/dnld/ExpertGuidelines_000.pdf

- “Are you willing to leave your office if needed to do behavior therapy?”

Note: It is sometimes necessary to go out of the office to do effective Exposure and Response Prevention (ERP) for OCD or BDD but not for Trich. If the therapist isn’t willing to do this then there is a chance this is not a good match for your needs.

- Are there therapies that compliment ERP or HRT and are you trained in them?

Note: Both Mindfulness and Acceptance and Commitment therapy (ACT) have a place in the treatment for OCD or BDD or Trich. The Mindfulness therapist should have done recognized course in this area and again it needs to be more than just a couple of weekends of training. Also, if the Mindfulness therapist is using CBT as well as Mindfulness then they should be fully trained in both types of therapy. Unfortunately, in Ireland there are only a few people who meet this requirement (again this is due to the government not setting up standards therefore this means there are therapists who are not fully trained in using this type of Mindfulness). The main recognized training organization for ACT is ACT Now Ireland so it can be worthwhile checking with this group although there are therapists who have attend recognized trainings in the UK and in the USA.

Final Note: *Finally, it is worth mentioning that because the government has not set standards for training it is important to understand that the therapist/psychologist needs to have done more than a couple of weekends of CBT training. CBT is a type of therapy that needs ongoing training due to its complex nature. If the person you have contacted has only done a one or two day training for OCD or BDD or Trich then perhaps this is not the right person for you since that is probably not enough training in the specific area of ERP (for OCD/BDD) or HRT (for Trich). Also, if the person has not done a course that is recognized by the BABCP or PSI then the training has not been endorsed by a relevant psychological organization. Finally, if the therapist is not getting on-going supervision from a fully trained CBT therapist (again this means a supervisor who has more than a couple of weekends of CBT training and is endorsed as a supervisor by either the BABCP or ICP) then again this may not be someone who has enough experience and/or education in these areas of CBT to adequately treat OCD, BDD or Trich. It may seem like this is a tall order to find someone who meets all of these requirements but they do exist and it is worth it to find them since they have the full and appropriate training!*

BABCP website: <http://www.babcp.com/Default.aspx>

ICP website: <http://www.psychotherapy-ireland.com/>

**Registered or accredited therapist means this person has complied with the requirements of the named psychological society to receive this group's endorsement. If you should have a problem with this therapist then you can file a complaint directly with this group. Example of groups who give this recognition the BABCP, ICP and the PSI. If you go to a therapist who is not recognized as a registered or accredited therapist and you have a significant issue with him/her then you do not have any rights in this situation because there is nobody who you can file a complaint with.*

This has been adapted from: "How To Choose a Behavior Therapist" by Michael Jenike, MD as well as the International OCD Foundation Guide, 'What You Need to Know About Obsessive Compulsive Disorder'. This can be found on the OCD Ireland website.