

That's a Hard No

Transcript: S2 Mini2 "How do we find a therapist and what should we expect from the process?"

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Heather: Welcome to That's a Hard No, the podcast about saying no and setting boundaries

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Sarah: so you can become the authentic and empowered 'you' that this world needs.

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Heather: Before we start, a quick reminder:

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Sarah: While I am a licensed professional clinical counselor, this podcast is in no way a replacement for one on one therapy with a mental health professional. If you notice the content in this episode triggering some big feelings, visit our website. Hardnopedcast.com for mental health resources and other helpful links.

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Heather: In season two of That's a Hard No we're making it. a priority to dig deeper into the process of finding and utilizing the help you may need, we want to make the time to discuss with our in-house expert Sarah Saunders, what to expect from therapy and all of its intricacies. So, Sarah now that we know what to look for...How do we find a therapist and what should we expect from the process?

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Sarah: Absolutely, so I am going to break this down. For those of you that are listening and you're not driving, this might be a good time to get out a paper and pen so you can jot down some things. But first and foremost it's important to identify what kind of therapy services you are seeking and then also understanding and having the conversation about. Do you want to use insurance or not? And so if insurance is a route that you want to go, you can absolutely call your insurance company and you can ask them to provide a list of providers within the network, within your network that are covered by your insurance. That's really important. The other thing is is that you can go on to psychologytoday.com. You can put your insurance information, who your provider is, but you can also search for your area, putting your zip code in. You can also, you know, check some boxes if you're looking for. You know couples therapy, family therapy, individual, you know, anxiety, depression, mood disorder, whatever it is, and it's an interesting platform, is that it's almost like a dating website, where all of these different profiles come up and you can read their profile, you can see a picture of them and then it oftentimes has a link to their website. So this is another really great way for you to find. You know a therapist. You can also use wonderful Google. You can google therapist near me. You know and that's an option nowadays and Heather I'm sure you're familiar with this right now, at my practice, Purposeful Growth and Wellness, we offer a hybrid model, meaning that we do both in person and virtual. So you can also search for therapists specifically if you are looking for someone that is virtual or you know in person.

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Heather: Yeah, I think I mentioned this to you offline that my daughter is a college student

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and you know she is looking for some support and she previously, you know, talked to someone here in our local area and then they sort of did some virtual sessions because everybody moved that way when COVID hit. But now she's like kinda living on her own and she wants someone that she can you know have someone to talk to every now and then away at college. So we've been talking about that and you know we, our insurance company, has a web portal and you can go in and you can search. It's a little overwhelming.

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Sarah: It absolutely is.

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Heather: I have to say like that this big list comes up and even, like you know, she has specific issues, topics, points of view, she might . She might want that therapist to be in alignment with, and it's hard to know. Like, if someone says they specialize in a certain field, how do we know that they have a certain certification, or is it just they're just putting it in there so that they can get clients like it's it's hard to know.

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Sarah: Right.

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Heather: It's hard to comparison shop a therapist. It's not the same as a car, you know?

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Sarah: Heather, you bring up a really good point and again, someone looking for a therapist, it's not their job to always know exactly what they're looking for. There's a lot of you know jargon out there that, yes, it can make it seem like, oh my gosh, they do all of these things. What exactly do I need? Another piece, especially for you know, younger kids is really, you know, talking to pediatricians, talking to your primary care physician often times when it comes to someone in that you know, does that type of work. They've oftentimes networked with people and have a specific database of providers. So I think that's really important. I know for me that if someone calls in and I know that it's not a good fit, I personally ensure that the people that I do provide the referral, that I know that practice, I know what it is that they do. You can always kind of trial and error and this does take a little bit of effort, but you could always call a practice, share with them. You know what you're looking for and we're all in the helping profession. So I would like to say all of us, but a majority will be able to, you know, kind of lead you in that direction when it comes to college kids, universities and college campuses are required to have mental health therapists on staff and so you know, reaching out to the academic advisor or going to, you know, asking a professor would be helpful. And then, if they are, and I know so many are just at capacity right now and there's wait lists, they can also provide some direction for students in college.

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Heather: And I know this can be a little touchy or controversial and we don't want to mention any specific platform or brand names, because they're not paying us for sponsorship. Are there any pitfalls around any of these sort of therapy apps? I mean, I know

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there's a wide variety. Some are just texting and chat and some are actually you're meeting with people and like. Is that a viable option for some people?

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Sarah: So again, you're the expert of you, you know what you need. More times than not. When I get phone calls in, people are looking for you know that deeper, deeper work and so being able to meet face-to-face is really important. However, there are some people that they're not there yet, that maybe their first step to therapy is just having, like an accountability person, you know having someone that they can touch base with. There's different hotlines out there too. If there is like a crisis situation, but maybe the texting or the virtual is what they need right now and then they can grow into, you know, in person.

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Heather: That's interesting. Yeah.

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Sarah: So I think it's you know, really again checking in with yourself, but also recognizing what services are available for you at that, at that time, because I work with a lot of motherhood across the lifespan and especially during the pandemic, moms specifically, you know, to get child care and and I actually worked with, and I'm still working with, a very dear client of mine who she has a child with complex needs, and so we have had several appointments where she's been at PICU, at Cleveland clinic with her daughter and I've been able to provide virtual services or even just a phone call for her, you know, during those times.

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Heather: So right now it seems like there's more options available than ever. In some ways the pandemic opened that up for a lot of people, and in some ways that's a good thing, absolute this may. This may be something you're planning and talking about later, but I mean that list can be overwhelming. Let's say you narrow it down to three or four people and you start calling around what. What are the questions you should ask? Decide, besides telling them your situation and what you're looking for, the things you should ask.

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Sarah: Absolutely, you know, and I think finances trump all stressors. So I really think it's important to identify if the provider that you're seeking, if they accept insurance or if they are private pay. If a provider is private pay, it is important to ask them if they do provide a super bill. And what that is is that if a provider is out of network, you can call your insurance company and you can ask them about your out-of-network benefits, and so if the provider does provide the super bill, you would get the super bill and then you can submit that directly to insurance for reimbursement. It's just not the therapist's responsibility to do that.

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Heather: So it's the way you kind of do the accounting for your out of pocket expenses towards and then once you've hit your limit, then perhaps insurance would kick in or something.

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Sarah: Exactly, and you can also ask about if they accept FSA or HSA or if you have those accounts. So I think you know really identifying the payment aspect of it. And then too I think it's important. You know, yes, to share your story. One of the things for me is: do they make you feel heard within that first initial phone call? So I know for me in my practice. So I am private pay and I do provide the super bill for clients upon request, but also provide a 15 to 20 minute free consult, and so I'm not rushing people off the phone. I'm really making sure that they feel heard. And so some questions. You know, Heather, if you were to call a therapist that was on your list, you know asking. You know, how long have you been doing this? What kind of clients do you see? You know, what kind of, you know, framework do you use? I think is helpful. So if you were to ask, you know, do you want to practice this really quick?

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Heather: Well, what kind of framework do you use? I don't even know what that means.

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Sarah: Sure so I would just say I come from a systemic perspective, meaning that I look at the whole family system and I work with clients that are navigating life, life challenges. I believe that everybody, their life, is like a book and there's a lot of chapters that have led them to where they are now. There's some of those chapters that you know there's some dust on them and we have to peel back the layers we have to heal and process so that we can then write what we want these next chapters to look like. It's important too to note I work with clients that have trauma and when I say trauma there's capital T Trauma, there's lower case t trauma. I deal with lower-case trauma -it's not always what happened to us but what happened inside of us. I do a lot of couple's work. My training is in marriage and family therapy, so just kind of understanding. I do a lot of mindfulness work, so getting a better understanding that way is very helpful.

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Heather: Yeah, I think that's all very helpful. I think I think the two key things I'm hearing is: make sure you feel you're being heard, because I think if you're not being heard in that initial conversation, that's a red flag and the point about getting the financials straight, understanding what your responsibilities are and what their responsibilities are and who's going to pay for it. You know, I think a lot of people, when they're under stress, they avoid thinking about money and then they end up in a worse situation in the end, and so it's important to face that from the beginning.

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Sarah: And if there isn't transparency from the therapist or if there is confusion, that's going to be a red flag, because during that first initial appointment you should be able to ask any question and have that direct communication, because oftentimes one of the skills that therapists are teaching is effective communication.

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Heather: Right.

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Sarah: So right off the bat. If you're confused about anything, always ask, can you clarify that? I also think it's important to ask what the process looks like. And so for me in my practice the first appointment is an hour and a half to two hours and it's a detailed assessment. It's really just to get to know you appointment, but then it's within that time-frame that we create a very individualized treatment plan to best meet your needs. And so we talk about goals. We talk about frequency of sessions. A red flag for me would be if someone, if a therapist said, based on the three minutes of information you just shared with me, we would be seeing each other weekly for six months, like the therapist doesn't know that because they don't know you yet.

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Heather: Yeah, that makes sense.

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Sarah: And then also so the initial intake appointment, what that looks like, and then the follow-up sessions. So for me the follow-up sessions are 50 to 60 minutes sessions.

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Heather: Okay, so you're kind of looking for someone to really hear you, listen to you, take the time to get to know you and then work with you to develop a plan. It shouldn't be written in stone. You shouldn't have to fit into a program. Right?

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Sarah: Absolutely.

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Heather: I think that makes sense to me.

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Sarah: I don't want you to get discouraged if you're making this call and maybe you're not getting a call back or you're feeling defeated because you called one place. It wasn't a great conversation. They said that they're on a wait list right now because of the mental crisis that's happening in the world right now. There are a lot of wait lists and they're, therapists are feeling burned-out and maybe their responses aren't as immediate as what they used to be. So I really want you to remember that. Keep trying. If this is something that you want, it's a, it's a muscle that you have to exercise in order to strengthen, practice making these phone calls. It may sound silly, but just even doing a little bit of roleplay, of writing down some specific questions, you know that you want to ask but don't allow a 'no' to be the end of it. You know, keep trying if this is something that you do want, because the right person is out there for you and you do deserve that time and attention.

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Heather: Yeah, that's a good point. There are a lot of people seeking help right now and so have some patience and persistence, because you're worth taking care of. I'm sure our listeners are going to have a ton more questions about therapy and therapists and how to find help and how to know whether you're getting the help you need. And so, I'm sure, as

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you said before, we're inviting our listeners to get in touch and ask your questions. We have more we are going to cover but we welcome any suggestions or questions through our website or social media. Send us your messages your questions through our website our social media, we would be happy to answer your questions.

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Sarah: Absolutely.