

That's a Hard No

Transcript: S2 Mini3 "How do I Know My Therapist is the Right Fit?"

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Sarah: 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 aick 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 podcast triggers some big feelings, visit our website, hardnopodcast.com for mental health resources and other helpful links.

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Heather: In season 2 of that's a hard no, we are making it a priority to dig deeper into the process of finding and utilizing the help you may need. We want to take the time to discuss with our in-house expert, Sarah Saunders, what to expect from therapy and all of its intricacies.

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Heather: Hi Sarah.

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Sarah: Hi Heather!

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Heather: So in our first two minisodes we talked about how to recognize when we need therapy and then how to find a therapist. So let's say, you've begun seeing someone. How do you know if your therapist is the right fit?

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Sarah: This is a really great question and I am going to break it down with ten specific things to just be mindful of to ensure that a therapist is the right fit for you. I do think that it's important to note that you have to shop around to find a good fit.

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Heather: Oh for sure, I know this in my own personal experience. I've I've yeah, had moments when I had to say this isn't working. I need to find someone else.

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Sarah: Absolutely so. The first thing is that you really want to feel comfortable and safe in an environment that is warm, calming and inviting, and so the other piece of this is that you want to ensure that you feel seen, heard and validated as humans. That is one of the things that makes us feel that we can be vulnerable when we are allowed to feel that way with someone else.

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Heather: Yeah, you need that to build trust in order to be yourself with someone.

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Sarah: Exactly, That emotional safety and security will then allow for that emotional connection to take place, and so it's important that the therapist that you feel, the person you're working with, truly wants what is best for you, and so a good therapist is going to offer resources and recommendations while also respecting your agency, respecting your ability to be the expert, and this includes you feeling part of the treatment and so recognizing, as I've said before, you are the expert, making sure that you feel part of the entire process. It feels that your therapist isn't talking at you but is talking to you.

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Heather: So you're empowered to make decisions and choices as part of the treatment plan.

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Sarah: Absolutely, and part of that is also the therapist is transparent and is a strong communicator. I know that that sounds silly, seeking therapy and meeting with someone who isn't great in communication, but you may find that that they're not communicating with you, the way that you feel you need, and so strong communicators they listen more than they speak. A good therapist is going to be an educator. However, you should fully understand the concepts that they're sharing and so, regardless of their credentialing, the language that they're using should be easily digestible to you. So if you're noticing that they're using these big fancy words or that psychological jargon, it's important to really feel like they're breaking it down in a way that's digestible and understandable for you, so that you fully understand what it is that they're talking about. And then, and I mention this in a previous minisode, but also the financial piece, really making sure that they are transparent about all the costs that are included with your treatment. And then again, those treatment goals, the strategies and the techniques being utilized are all being transparently communicated.

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Heather: So you know the plan, you know the course of action that's being applied to you. It's not just, you know, a mystery to you of what's going to happen in the end.

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Sarah: Exactly, exactly, and also feeling like you're able to be having that conversation, which leads me to the next point of a good therapist and a right fit, they're going to be constantly checking in with you, so navigating that that client therapist relationship. This is going to be new to you. If you're new to this process, your therapist should be checking in regularly with you about how you're feeling about the process, kind of taking your emotional temperature, like we talk about, to ensure that you are benefiting from treatment. And if you have any reservations, you can openly talk about ways to shift or pivot or, you know, checking in, because maybe you're at a place where you're finding it doesn't feel like a good fit and you may need a referral

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Heather: That makes sense.

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Sarah: The next piece would be: they take time to educate themselves specifically regarding

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your needs. Although, yes, your therapist is specialized in certain areas, that doesn't mean that they know everything, especially as it relates specifically to your needs. So Heather, one of the things that I find is that sometimes when people come in initially to my office, they come in for one thing, but as we start to dig deeper and as we start to really unpack, there's other things that come up and so being able to have that conversation with a therapist, and for the therapist to also ensure that the things that are coming up are in their wheelhouse and educating themselves to best support you, but also providing you with referrals or additional services if needed.

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Heather: So being, they're not defensive and, you know, trying to control their little fiefdom there. This is someone who thinks of this as a team effort and they will partner with whoever is needed and they bring in resources to support you.

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Sarah: Absolutely, and so just a small little example of this is that somebody may come into my office for relationship issues. Well, what we've uncovered may be that there is addiction happening or substance abuse, and so those are things that I'm not specialized in, and so part of my work is to just acknowledge without shame, blame, judgment or criticism. To just acknowledge this is something that I notice is impacting our work together. In order for us to continue this couple's work, I do feel it's best for you to seek additional services specifically related to the addiction or the substance abuse.

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Heather: Got it.

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Sarah: The other big thing, and this does take time, but really making sure that you notice a change in yourself. So change, especially meaningful and sustainable change. Heather, you know it takes time, it's it's not a light switch that just you know, goes on and off. So the length of treatment is very individualized and it truly depends on the person and the conditions that they come in with. But regardless, you should be feeling a change or a shift within a few sessions, although small at first, you should be feeling better, more supported, empowered and it not being the other way around.

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Heather: I know when, you know, everybody's different in my experience and when I've talked with other people about it. Sometimes when you first go into therapy, especially if you're new to it, what you'll feel the first few sessions is kind of raw because all of a sudden you're talking about stuff you're not used to talking about, and so you're kind of like this open wound walking around and you're a little bit touchy and emotional and you know, and but then, as you go on, you start to process some of the stuff and you start to learn the language of self-awareness and self-actualization and all that stuff. So so yeah, you do notice change over time, but you have to give yourself time to kind of get over that initial kind of opening of the wounds, you know.

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Sarah: Absolutely and I, oftentimes have, like a little warning sign that you're going to feel emotionally hung over after some of these sessions. This one is also really important: that you feel like you have the tools and the resources to do the work outside of the sessions because, although, yes, a lot of really good work happens in that 50 to 60 minute session with your therapist, the true work happens outside, and so yes to your point, Heather, as we talked, therapy is exhausting and it can be challenging. I oftentimes say that that heart work is the hardest work, but it's really important that that you feel supported and have the tools to recover emotionally from those sessions, to continue your healing and growth journey outside of your time together and being the expert, You know that's your way of letting them know if handouts or books or podcast or social media like, What's the best way for you to.

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Heather: Right.

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Sarah: Utilize those skills?

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Heather: Right, I mean, I know that I've you know I get homework, you know, and they say I want you to read this or listen to this or watch this, and then let's talk about it or try this exercise or this meditation, and then let's talk about how you felt. And so it isn't just you know, you talk and spill your guts, and then someone helps you see some brilliant thing you never noticed before, and then aha I'm fixed. It's changing a lifetime of mindset and patterns and behaviors, and that takes work.

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Sarah: Absolutely the last pieces. You can see and feel value in your work together, and so this is coupled with the point about you notice change in yourself. But one of the most important signs of a good therapist is how you feel about your work with them. It's important to feel positive about the direction, and a good therapist is going to make you feel hopeful, leaving you with that empowerment and the confidence to apply the things that you're working on in session outside.

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Heather: Yeah!

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Sarah: So, just to recap, the first thing is: you feel comfortable and safe. The environment is warm, calming and inviting. The second thing is you feel seen, heard and validated. The third: they truly want what's best for you. Fourth, the therapist is transparent in a strong communicator. Five: they check-in with you. Six, they take the time to educate themselves specifically regarding your needs. Seven, you notice a change in yourself. Eight, they challenge you respectfully. Nine, they give you tools and resources. The last thing is: you can see and feel the value in your work together.

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Heather: Yeah, that is a good, comprehensive list. If someone had asked me, actually, people have asked me in the past. How do you know if a therapist is a good fit? I'm like, well, you just kind of have a feeling this is great. This is actual measurable. Yeah, this is a good checklist I appreciate this.

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Sarah: Of course, and as I mentioned in the beginning, it is totally normal and necessary to shop around to find a good fit and also remember our bodies are so intuitive. So be sure to listen to your body and to your point, whether you know, pay attention to how you feel, because when you feel good about something, you're going to be able to invest more in it. But this is just a snapshot of some things to be extra mindful of.

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Heather: Thanks Sarah. I know things can be confusing and overwhelming, especially if you're new to therapy. Hopefully all this information will help our listeners gauge if they're on the right track or if they need to make a change. So, like I said before, I really appreciate this. This is a much bigger list than I had anticipated, so it's a nice holistic look at what you should be getting out of therapy.

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Sarah: Absolutely, and as I mentioned, we will have a graphic that you can find on our website under the resource tab, to really use as a guide while you're figuring out if a therapist is a good fit.

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Heather: And also on the show notes.

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Sarah: That's Right.

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Heather: So in our next minisode we will details of different types of mental health providers and what sets them apart from each other.

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Sarah: That sounds great.

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Heather: Thanks for listening, guys!

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Sarah: Take care.