

## **Finding a therapist if you are childfree by choice, childless not by choice, or any of the many combinations that bring us here.**

I firmly believe that therapy should be a place where we can feel safe from relentless bingos and misunderstanding. (Why didn't you adopt? Don't you worry you'd regret your choice? Ah, you get to sleep in.. You need to move on from this anger.) We guard ourselves in so many other relationships that it may feel like second nature to give our canned response to a therapist and then retreat from the topic that had been at hand. Of course, bumps in communication and understanding will absolutely happen in every therapeutic relationship and can sometimes even lead to growth and more safety.

Here are some tips to find a therapist who either has put in the work to serve you well or *will* put in the work as the two of you go along. (A therapist that thinks they're done learning is a big 'Nope!' in my book.) I want to acknowledge that many areas may have only a few therapists to choose from, which is so hard. If telehealth is an option for you and your health coverage or pocketbook, don't forget to expand your search beyond your zip code! Please note that I've included a wide array of ideas. Some of these items may stand out to you as important and others may feel like 'meh, not for me.'

If a therapist treats you poorly for asking any of these questions (or, really, anything else you are wondering) that is their own 'stuff' coming up. A quick little reality check is to ask yourself: "Would I expect a therapist to balk at questions about their training in postpartum depression? About life transitions such as becoming a Grandfather? About working with clients who are facing discrimination at work due to their parenthood?" Mm hmm..

### **Questions you can ask them:**

- Are you a parent? (The BIG ONE, right? Therapists may practice from a theory where they do not share personal details, which is their prerogative. It is also **absolutely** ok for you to want to know and to move on if their answer doesn't feel good to you.
- If you are **not** a parent I am wondering if you will understand my story of how I have also arrived here- it may be different from your story!
- If you **are** a parent, have you received professional training or consultation about working with childless/childfree people to expand your understanding of the many dimensions that I may bring to the table as well as your own biases?
- If you haven't received this training, are you willing to do so as we meet?

- I've felt misunderstood and even microaggressed in therapy in the past. Sometimes I close down to avoid feeling like this. How can I bring this up if it happens?
- What do you think might be some misunderstandings you and I could have about my life as a non-parent?
- Being childfree/childless is not the central issue I'm wanting to work on, but it will certainly be relevant at some point. How will you make sure that you and I are paying attention to this part of my identity?
- Who is your favorite childfree or childless icon, writer, character, community member etc.? (Side note: Check out Gateway Women's Pinterest board to see several hundred of these role models!)
- If I'm not a good fit for your practice, do you know any other therapists that I might contact?

**Look at their websites for biases:**

- Do they have a bio section and how does it align with your own experience? Have they included the pronatalist norm of a married couple, kids, and pets? If they've included this they may feel it makes them relatable but don't understand how 'othering' this could feel to people without those things.
- How do their images and writing feel? Are they using phrases like 'busy moms' or 'stressed dads' or always seem to equate adulthood with parenthood?
- Are they overwhelmingly focused on kids and families? (This is kind of funny for me to write, since a third of my practice is with children. It's an interesting combo due to my lived experience. If you do some questioning you could learn that they actually have deep experience various ages of people or perhaps they have focused on children in the past, but their heart really lies with adult work at this time.)
- What is their intake paperwork or disclosure statement like? Does it feel affirming to you? For instance, asking "tell me about your loved ones" can feel very different from "describe your family."
- What items do they reference in their blog or resources section (books, podcasts, apps) and are they resources that you would actually use? Are they inclusive of people without children?