Alice,

For a long time, I have managed to persevere through some really messed up situations with family, friends, and life without seeing a counselor. It is not that I hold a negative opinion of counseling; it is that I can't afford it. I've hung tough; I'm a little proud of that. I've survived.

I am a recent college graduate relocating to a new city. I would like to seek counseling when there to work through a lot of these issues, but I frankly do not see how I would be able to afford it. Would you have any recommendation as to where I (or anyone in general who might have this problem) could locate free or low-cost counseling?

Also, while I understand many jobs include counseling as part of a health plan, this may or may not be an option for me (and others), so I would appreciate any alternatives to that you might suggest. Thank you for providing such a service to the Internet at large. You're really a godsend.

Signed,
A Bit Tired of Going It Alone

Answer

Dear A Bit Tired of Going It Alone,

Bravo for making this decision to seek counseling. Finding a counselor in a new city can take some legwork, but it is definitely doable. Here are a few suggestions:

- Check with nearby universities to see if they have graduate programs in psychology or social work. Find out if they have a clinic affiliated with their school, or if they know of community clinics that may be appropriate for you to call. Some major teaching hospitals may also have mental health clinics where they see people at low cost.
- Many cities have training institutes for postgraduates in psychology and social work. These therapists-in-training see individuals and couples, usually at low cost. Students are supervised, which helps assure quality care. In addition, you can check out the American Psychological Association [2], or the National Association of Social Workers [3], to find counselors in your area.
- Not-for-profit organizations exist in many cities that either offer low-cost counseling or offer referrals and can help you find a therapist who sees people on a sliding scale. Mental Health America [4] (formerly the National Mental Health Association) has tips on
locating providers and paying for care.
- Your primary health care provider can make a referral for you.
- Friends who live in the area you’re moving to may have recommendations. Many counselors with private practices offer sliding fee services, however you may have to talk with friends and do some calling to find them.

Once you select a counselor, it’s a good idea to call her/him to meet for "an initial assessment"? a one-session meeting where you can determine how you might feel about working with them. As a rule, it is useful to ask about the background, education, training, and philosophy of the counselor you may choose to see. Plus, it’s important to feel comfortable, respected, and a sense that this is someone from whom you can learn. If you feel otherwise, you may want to thank the counselor for their time and move on to the next provider on your list.

Wishing you the best,

Alice!

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