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### **My Health, My Relationships, My Career: How to Choose the Best Therapist/Counselor in 7 Easy Steps:**

Finding the best therapist/counselor is critical in receiving the greatest benefit from the therapy/counseling process. You are your greatest investment. As a result, you want to ensure that you are finding the best professional for yourself, your personal growth and your life. You are selecting a professional who will help improve your mental, emotional and physical health, your relationships and/or your career. You want to find a professional that will help you lead a life filled with meaning and that will assist you into realizing your fullest potential. What could be more important? Given the significance of your life and everything important that it entails, you want to select a professional who is going assist you in improving the most important facets of your life: your health, relationships and/or career. People do extensive research when buying a car, why wouldn't someone do the same when looking for a therapist?

Regardless of whether you have or have not looked for a therapist in the past, the process can be confusing, overwhelming and anxiety provoking. Furthermore, there are many choices in selection. Given that therapy is one of the greatest personal gifts you can give to yourself or someone you deeply care about; it is vital that you find best therapist for yourself and/or your family. To ease and simplify the process: seven easy steps will be provided that will help you choose the best counselor for yourself and your situation. This short e-book outlines seven of these easy steps (please note: the words "therapist" and "counselor" are used interchangeably and items are not listed by priority).

- 1. Therapeutic Rapport:** Given that the relationship between client and therapist is a collaborative one where both client and therapist work together, the **most vital factor** in your selection is therapeutic rapport. Therapeutic rapport means finding the right match. This is the most important element in selecting a therapist. Across the board, research studies confirmed this finding. Regardless of theoretical orientation or school of thought that a therapist adheres to in working with you; your rapport with your therapist is the most important component in determining the progress you will make during your therapy or counseling.

The therapeutic relationship should make you feel safe, comfortable and at ease. You want to feel aligned with the counselor: that you are on the same team working toward the same goals. You want to feel that you are being listened to, acknowledged, honored and understood. In addition, you should feel that you can depend on your therapist for honest helpful feedback, that they have integrity and have your best interest at heart as

a client. You want to feel that they are genuinely advocating for your personal growth and improvement.

Questions to ask oneself include: Is the therapist warm and inviting? Do they seem approachable, accessible and exude a positive energy? Is it easy to make small talk? Is the counselor down to earth and easy to relate to or does he or she feel cold, distant and emotionally removed? Does the therapist seem to be a “know it all” or arrogant?

Going to a therapist for the first time may elicit some anxiety, and it is important to separate our own discomfort from the actual counselor. At the same time, if you determine that a particular counselor is not a good fit for you, that is acceptable. Honor your feelings and intuition. It is not personal. It simply is not the best match. There is no contract or rule governing you to continue working with any counselor. You should never feel pressured to have to commit to any counselor.

You may even consider scheduling a consultation with a prospective counselor. If you find that you are interested in a particular counselor, call them and request a consultation. The consultation is similar to test-driving a car. It affords you the opportunity to discuss your situation in more detail, the goals you are hoping to achieve, ask relevant questions, get a “feel or intuitive sense” of the counselor, determine how well matched you are as a therapeutic team before you commit to the process or proceed with counseling.

Nevertheless, it is imperative to identify whether there is a part of you avoiding therapy through a dislike or judgment of the therapist. If you find yourself reacting negatively to every counselor you see, then the mismatch may be a result of something that needs to be personally addressed and may warrant that you work through the resistance of the counseling process with a counselor in an effort to work through your fears of beginning or being in therapy.

## **2. What is the counselor’s general philosophy and approach to helping?**

Psychology was a byproduct of philosophy. The word psychology comes from two Greek words meaning the study of the soul. The theories that fuel therapy provide a philosophy of life and a theology of man-our human nature, how we develop our personalities and how we evolve as people.

Does the therapist adhere to the “medical-model” or “disease model” that the majority of mental health clinicians and medical doctors adhere to? The medical model supports the idea that a person with social or mental problems is “ill” (hence individuals are referred to as “patients”) and limits their understanding of their patients through a “diagnosis”. Medical “treatment” targets symptoms and clinicians determine what to do with their “patients” based on “medical necessity.”

Or does your counselor incorporate a personal growth model that strives to remove pathology from the human condition. Psychotherapy deals with the social, mental, and emotional aspects of individuals, couples and families. Within the personal growth model, the individual seeking professional help is referred to as a “client” because the individual is perceived to have areas of strength and resources that need to be cultivated to address their areas of self-improvement and to establish new patterns of behavior.

Does your counselor approach human beings in a gentle, humanistic, compassionate, loving and optimistic way? Does he or she believe humans are born good natured, loving and lovable, capable of personal growth or does the counselor believe people are born deficient, or are a product of their environment?

Also, does the therapist work holistically with the whole person including the various dimensions of spiritual, psychological, physical, and relational aspects of your being or are they more dualistic separating the mind and body and engaging in linear thinking that looks at cause and effect?

Regardless of the model they adhere to, you want their model of healing to be reflective of yours and resonate with you. This helps in establishing whether the therapist is the best fit for you.

- 3. Can the counselor define how he or she can help you attain your personal goals or areas of self-improvement or address the concern that has brought you to therapy?** Experienced counselors can explain how they are able to help. They also will give you a basic “road map,” to their approach, and can even give an indication of how you will know when therapy is finished.

They should be able to explain to you in a nutshell the process of counseling or therapy. The phases you will experience and what to expect within each phase. They will also outline how they will measure your progress and what method they will use to determine when you have completed the therapy.

- 4. Does the counselor encourage dependence or independence?** Is the therapist encouraging you to cultivate and tap into your own resources and strengths to help you help yourself toward healing? Are they encouraging empowerment and self-reliance to navigate your way through life based on your own views, values and beliefs?

Good therapy does not solve your problems for you; it provides you with the sacred space for you to solve your own. In addition, good therapy does not soothe your overwhelming feelings; it helps you learn to soothe your own feelings. As the familiar proverb, therapy is most powerful when it helps people to learn to fish for themselves rather than rely on another to feed them. If your counselor provides wisdom, answers, or emotional support without encouraging you to access your own resources, it is more

likely you will become dependent on your therapist to help you feel better, rather than learning to depend on yourself.

An outstanding therapist will help you access and implement your own personal truth, knowledge, wisdom and power. A remarkable therapist will help teach you to honor yourself and as a result learn to live joyfully and whole-heartedly.

- 5. Does the therapist have experience helping others with the particular issues for which you are seeking therapy?** Adequate level of experience, years in practice and demonstrated competence with the issues for which you are seeking help is critical. The greater the experience therapists have addressing a particular area of growth, concern, or problem area, the more expertise they have developed. Various therapists have specialty or niche areas in which they have sought additional education, training or supervision.

Certain specialty areas such as trauma, anxiety disorders, depressive disorders, addiction or relationship counseling requires a therapist with extensive knowledge and experience. Inquire about the therapist's experience in working with these areas and the amount of success they have seen.

- 6. Does your counselor practice to the highest ethical principles in regard to issues such as boundaries, dual relationships, and confidentiality?** There are numerous ethical guidelines designed to keep therapists from harming clients and providing guidance to do good.

Most important, there is a guideline prohibiting against dual relationships. When a therapist enters into a therapeutic relationship with a client, he or she should not have any other relationship with that person, such as teacher, friend, employer, or family member. A therapist is a professional present in your life to meet your counseling-related needs for empathy, understanding, support, guidance and healing. When a counselor gets his or her own needs (emotional or otherwise) met by the client, he has crossed a boundary, and the therapy process can be damaged or ruined.

- 7. Is the counselor licensed?** Is the counselor licensed to practice in your state? Licensure implies that a counselor has engaged in extensive postgraduate counseling experience which, depending on the state of licensure, may include up to 3,000 hours of required supervised experience. It also means the counselor has passed a licensing exam. You can contact your State Professional Licensing Board to verify the licensure of a provider.

Does the counselor have a graduate degree? There are numerous people who call themselves "counselors" or "therapists" because they have taken a weekend seminar or have learned a certain therapeutic approach. Without academic and professional training that a graduate degree in counseling, psychology, social work, marriage and

family therapy, or another related field of study, such a person lacks the education, training, and skills to provide safe psychotherapy and counseling.

It is highly recommended to only work with counselors and therapists who have graduate training. People without graduate-level education in a mental health field may lack the necessary skills and know-how to properly diagnose and treat issues, and there is a great danger in misdiagnosing and mistreating. Psychology is an enormous field, and human beings are multifaceted and complex. It takes years of education and training to effectively assist individuals. Without the proper training, there is great risk of causing harm.

**About Dr. Aleksandra Drecun:**

I am the founder of Association for Compassionate Transformation. I am a licensed psychologist who has a profound passion and derives immense gratitude from assisting individuals, couples and families in realizing their fullest potential.

I am deeply passionate about my work and am honored to have been chosen as a healing arts practitioner on the journey to self-improvement. I find my work as a counselor/psychologist to be highly rewarding and fulfilling. I never underestimate the courage and strength it requires to engage in self-introspection and work toward positive change in becoming one's true and authentic self.

Counseling or psychotherapy is a process that emphasizes the human capacity to overcome adversity and to be better versions of ourselves. I highly respect and admire each client I encounter. I am inspired by each client's tenacity to grow and become better individuals as they resolve life's challenges. I am genuinely interested in the health and happiness of my clients. I am committed to providing the highest quality of care and maintain a deep desire to facilitate transformation that produces a purpose-driven life.

My practice includes treatment of children, adults, couples, families and groups. My specialties include addiction, anxiety, depression, skin-picking, hypnotherapy, relationships, trauma and trichotillomania.

I am a highly effective and efficient professional that paves the way for clients' to reach their desired goals. My therapeutic style emanates warmth, compassion and professionalism. My therapeutic approach is collaborative, authentic and client-centered. I work to empower clients and teach them to become proactive by building upon their strengths. I provide a safe, caring and nonjudgmental environment that centers on client needs. Each therapy session will focus on promoting personal growth and success!

If you have any questions, please send me an email to [Dr.Drecun@a4ct.com](mailto:Dr.Drecun@a4ct.com). Thanks for reading!

PS~ Please feel free to share this with your friends, family, co-workers, and anyone else who can appreciate learning how to choose the best therapist.