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**Strategies and Resources: Tips for finding the right Private Counsellor**

**Contents**

1. [Purpose of this guide](#Purpose)
2. [What is a Professional Body?](#Body)
3. [Where do I look for a counsellor?](#Look)
4. [Questions to ask a counsellor](#Questions)

1. [Questions to ask yourself](#QuestionsYou)

**1. Purpose of this guide**

Finding a private counsellor can be a confusing process. There are many different therapeutic approaches and therapists to choose from. Often, it may take time to find the fit and approach that works best for you.

The purpose of this guide is to help you navigate the process of finding a counsellor and answer some of the questions that commonly come up.

Remember, these things take time, if one counsellor or type of therapy didn’t feel right for you, don’t give up- try again.

**2. What is a Professional Body?**

One important factor to consider when choosing any counsellor/ therapist is if that person is registered with a professional body. ‘A professional body is an organisation that oversees and regulates the conduct and practice of counsellors and therapists in the UK’ (Hall, 2023).

‘Each body has its own requirements for its members, such as completing a certain number of practice hours and following strict ethical guidelines and complaint procedures’ (Hall, 2023).

It is not a legal requirement for a practising counsellor to be a member of a professional body. However, by choosing to be a member, that counsellor is openly showing the principals and ethics they believe in and chooses to follow. Professional bodies also serve to:

* ‘Protect the public…by ensuring that professionals meet practice standards and adhere to a code of ethics. This provides assurance for those seeking help, knowing that they are consulting with a vetted professional who meets the necessary standards’.
* ‘Support professionals by providing continuous learning and professional development resources’. Including ‘opportunities for training, workshops, conferences, and access to the latest research and developments in the field’.
* ‘Advocate for the profession. These bodies represent the interests of practitioners and the field at large in discussions with policymakers and the public’.

(Spendelow, n.d.)

**The National Counselling & Psychotherapy Society (NCPS) and The British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP)**

The NCPS (formally NCS), and BACP, ‘are two significant’ professional bodies ‘in the field of mental health (Spendelow, n.d.). Both are home to professionals dedicated to supporting mental health, but they have different characteristics’ (Spendelow, n.d.). Both are recognised by the NHS.

Although the BACP is older, has a large membership base, and is often the automatic choice for professionals, the NCPS has gained significant recognition and increased membership over recent years.

And of course, there are many other professional bodies which operate within the UK. Follow this [LINK](https://www.manageminds.co.uk/blog/anxiety/uk-counselling-and-therapy-professional-bodies/#counselling-and-therapy-bodies) to find information on the others\*.

\**Intended as a guide only. It is important to conduct your own thorough independent research when choosing any mental health professional. Nothing in this guide is intended as a recommendation or endorsement and is for informational purposes only.*

**3. Where do I look for a counsellor?**

There are a number of places online that you can use to search for a counsellor. Please be aware that, particularly if the therapy is online, therapists may not be based in the UK and so adhere to different professional guidelines. Below are links to some places you can start our search.

* [Counselling Directory](https://www.counselling-directory.org.uk/)
* [Psychology Today’s online directory](https://www.psychologytoday.com/gb/counselling)
* [British Association for counselling and psychotherapy directory](https://www.bacp.co.uk/search/Therapists)
* [Association for counselling and therapy online](https://www.acto.org.uk/directories/acto-therapists-directory/)
* [UK Councill for Psychotherapy](https://www.psychotherapy.org.uk/)

The **National Autistic Society** also runs an [autism services directory](https://www.autism.org.uk/autism-services-directory). This lists lots of different autism services not just counsellors. You can use keywords such as ‘Therapist’ or ‘Therapy’ to search for counsellors using this service.

**4. Questions to ask counsellors to determine their suitability to work with you**

You will usually be able to have an initial chat with a counsellor/therapist to discuss the support you are looking for and to determine if you can both work with each other. Below are some suggestions for questions you might want to ask.

**Could you tell me about the last autism training you had? Did it have input from or was it delivered by autistic people?**

Understanding of autism and best practices are ever changing and so information someone learnt five years ago will often be out of date today.

You may also of heard the phrase ‘nothing about us without us’, it is important that training is designed with, and where possible, co-delivered by autistic people. This ensures authenticity, relevance, and practicality by incorporating first-hand insights.

It fosters empathy, breaks down stereotypes, enhances credibility, and promotes effective communication. This approach empowers individuals with lived experience, ensuring their voices are heard and respected, while also providing culturally competent and accurate understanding, leading to more compassionate and effective support strategies.

**What do you know about Alexithymia and how do you adapt your practices to account for it?**

Some studies suggest that 49% (Kinnaird et al, 2019) of autistic people have Alexithymia. This is often referred to as emotional blindness. A person with Alexithymia will likely struggles to identify and/or describe emotions they are feeling.

This means that in practice questions such as ‘How are you feeling’ are unhelpful. If this affects you it is important that the therapist/councillor has a good understanding of how to adapt their practice to support with this.

**What adaptations do you make for autistic/neurodivergent clients?**

Their answer to this will give you an idea of how they will work with you and gives you an opportunity to discuss things that might not work for you. Be wary of responses such as ‘I try to put *the autism* to one side’ as this misunderstands autism and implies that its separate from the things going on in your life and difficulties you might be having.

**5. Questions to ask yourself.**

It is important that you spend some time thinking about what you’d like to get out of therapy. Below are some questions you could consider asking yourself before beginning your search for a counsellor.

**What are my goals for therapy?**

Clarifying your objectives can guide your choice. Are you looking to address specific issues like anxiety, depression, or grief? Or do you want to work on personal development or coping mechanisms?

**What type of therapy aligns with my needs?**

Different therapeutic approaches, such as cognitive-behavioural therapy, psychodynamic therapy, or humanistic therapy, might suit different goals. Consider researching or speaking with potential counsellors to find one that you feel will work best for you.

**What are my communication needs?**

Take some time to think about what you need to support effective communication between yourself and your counsellor. Do you need face to face appointments or online? Do you need them to summarise sessions for you or would you be ok recording the sessions?

**What can I afford/What am I willing to pay?**

Counselling can be a significant financial commitment, and it is important to ensure that the costs are realistic and within your budget to avoid additional stress. Being clear about your financial limits will also help when identifying counsellors who fit within your price range, ensuring you can continue to have the sessions for as long as you need them.

It is also worth remembering you can use [Access to work](https://www.gov.uk/access-to-work) to pay towards counselling ([Easy read guidance here](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/641b17fa8fa8f547c9a6d794/easy-read-access-to-work.pdf)).

Some home, life and travel insurance companies will cover some costs of therapies ([Guidance from Mind can be found here](https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/guides-to-support-and-services/insurance-cover-and-mental-health/specialist-insurers-for-pre-existing-conditions/)). If you receive [Personal Independence Payments](https://www.gov.uk/pip) (PIP) you can also us this to pay towards therapy/counselling.

**Good luck**

Ensuring you find someone who you feel comfortable with and uses an approach that makes sense to you is essential to get the most out of any kind of therapy or counselling.

It is worth taking the time to think about what you need and to do your research. And don’t forget, all counsellors are different so if it doesn’t work out with one, it is worth trying again.

**Small disclaimer**

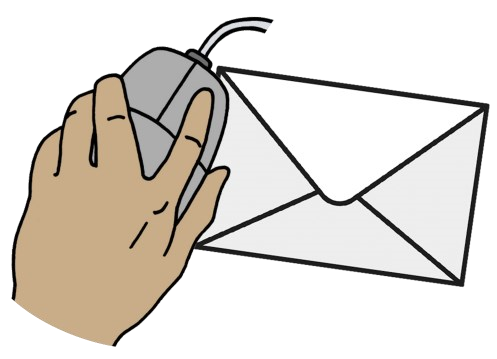
Please be aware that Leeds Autism AIM can’t recommend counsellors and so staff will likely point you to this resource if they are asked to provide recommendations.

**References**

* Hall, B. (2023) *Counselling and Therapy, Professional Bodies in the UK* [Online]. Available from: < <https://www.manageminds.co.uk/blog/anxiety/uk-counselling-and-therapy-professional-bodies/#NCS> > [Accessed 17/10/2023].
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* Kinnaird, E., Stewart, C., & Tchanturia, K. (2019). Investigating alexithymia in autism: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *European Psychiatry*, *55*, 80-89.

**Contact Us**

This guide was produced by **Leeds Autism AIM**, part of The Advonet Group. We are a free service co-led by and run for autistic adults (aged 18+) in the Leeds area.



* Email us at **aimenquiries@advonet.org.uk**
* Call The Advonet Group’s office on **0113 244 0606** and ask for someone from our team
* Follow us on Facebook at **@leedsautismaim**
* Follow us on X/Twitter at **@leedsautismAIM**

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