



Finding A Relationship Professional In Your Community

Persons seeking counselling services, or separation/divorce services after a relationship has run aground require help that is best tailored to their needs. The challenge becomes finding the right service provider suited to your situation.

Some folks are able to rely upon the experience of friends or family. It is reasonable to turn to your circle of contacts to seek suggestions for service providers they can vouch for. However, sometimes people don't want those around them to know of their troubles. At other times, a person may be somewhat isolated with no one to turn to for direction or suggestion.

When seeking a good service provider from scratch, it can be helpful to obtain a referral, if not from friends or family, then from another trusted professional. To this end, people may consult with a physician, accountant, clergy or attorney.

If these persons know you and know a number of other professionals, they may even be able to direct you in a way that matches your personality and issues with the personality and expertise of the professional.

If you do not even have access to this kind of input, then you are left with more traditional methods such as telephone directories and Internet search engines. In these situations, while you can phone any service provider directly, another approach is to call those who may rely upon the kind of service provider you are seeking.

For example, if seeking counselling or mediation services for parenting disputes, consider calling a few family attorneys and/or physicians to ask whom they typically refer to in your area. After speaking with several attorneys and/or physicians to seek their suggestions, then one or two counsellors may emerge as a common recommendation. This kind of approach and homework can help you sift through the myriad of available service providers to hopefully find the better known and more credible.

After you have sourced several potential service providers, the next step is to assess the professional for yourself. This may include viewing their website, doing a credential check by calling their governing professional organization to see that they are a member in good standing and then by calling the professional directly.

When calling, respect the professional's time. Briefly describe your situation the service you are seeking, and then ask a few questions. For example:

1. Is this the kind of service you provide?
2. What is your expertise with these kinds of issues?
3. What costs are involved?
4. Are you a member in good standing with your licensing body?
5. Is there a wait-list and how soon can I be seen?
6. Is there anything I should know about costs or your approach to service?

Review their respective answers as well as their disposition to speaking with you. How they speak with you may tell you more about the service provider than what they say specifically.

Thereafter make your selection on the basis of the information you obtained. Remember that in the end, if you are dissatisfied, as the consumer you have the right to address any issues in terms of the service delivery and you retain the right to change service providers if not satisfied.

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Gary Direnfeld is a social worker. Courts in Ontario, Canada, consider him an expert on child development, parent-child relations, marital and family therapy, custody and access recommendations, social work and an expert for the purpose of giving a critique on a Section 112 (social work) report. Call him for your next conference and for expert opinion on family matters. Services include counselling, mediation, assessment, assessment critiques and workshops.