

**If you are looking for a new Counsellor or Psychotherapist here are some questions you can ask them:** Directly quoted from: 'Take Back Your Life – Recovery from Cults and Abusive Relationships' (2006) Janja Lalich and Madeleine Tobias (Italics added by Gillie Jenkinson, [www.hopevalleycounselling.com](http://www.hopevalleycounselling.com)).

### **Questions to Ask in the First Session**

Consider asking the following questions during your first session with a therapist or counsellor. Remember, you do not have to continue with the first counsellor you see. Don't be afraid to interview the therapist to make sure he or she will be the one most likely to meet your needs:

1. What is your educational background? Are you licensed or accredited?
2. What is your counselling experience? How long, and with what types of clients?
3. Do you have an area of expertise?
4. Do you have training in or an understanding of cults and thought reform [*or whatever area you are wanting therapy in*]?
5. Are you a former member of a cultic group or relationship? What kind of post cult counselling did you receive?
6. What type of therapy do you practice (e.g. Freudian, Jungian, cognitive-behavioural, humanistic, transpersonal, bodywork, *Gestalt*), and what will it involve?
7. Do you use hypnosis or other trance-inducing techniques? (Some types of therapy use New Age concepts, guided-visualisation techniques and hypnosis, which may trigger you and compound your difficulties.)
8. Do you believe in so-called therapeutic touching of clients? What, in your opinion, is permissible touching?
9. Do you believe it is ever appropriate to have sex with clients or former clients? (Run – don't walk – out of the office if the answer is anything other than Never.)
10. Are you reachable in a crisis or an emergency? How are crisis consultations billed?
11. What is your fee? Do you have a sliding scale? What is your cancellation policy?
12. What is the length of a regular session?
13. How do you feel about New Age concepts? Do you incorporate any New Age techniques in your therapy (e.g. using crystals or past-life regressions)?
14. Would you tell me a little about your philosophy of life?
15. Do you believe in setting treatment goals? How are these established?

## **Questions to Ask Yourself After the First Session**

1. Do I feel accepted, respected and comfortable with the therapist?
2. Did anything in the environment make me feel uneasy? (Don't feel strange if you react to the furniture, paintings, books or other objects in the office.)
3. Was the therapist direct and open in answering all my questions, or did he/she dodge some?
4. Did the therapist give me the impression that he/she has all the answers (if so, consider going to another therapist), or did he/she seem interested in exploring issues with no preconceived expectations?
5. Does the therapist seem sensitive, intelligent, and mature, someone with whom I feel safe?
6. Did the therapist go overboard in assuring me that I now had the right counsellor? In other words, was I being set up to idealise him as the perfect therapist, the only one who could heal me?

## **General Matters to Keep in Mind**

- Trust your own judgement. You have the right not to trust immediately. Trust needs to be earned; there are no shortcuts.
- Interview several therapists. After all, you don't buy the first car or stereo system you look at.
- Get information and/or referrals from friends, other former [*cult*] members, International Cultic Studies Association and such agencies as rape crisis [[www.rapecrisis.org](http://www.rapecrisis.org)] centres (the latter generally know therapists skilled in dealing with trauma issues).
- You can stop therapy any time you want. Therapy is for you, not the therapist.
- Touching is a highly personal issue. Some therapists will hug a client. If you'd like a hug, you should initiate this action, not the therapist. Touching should be discussed openly, early in therapy. If touching makes you feel uncomfortable, say something right away.
- It is never okay to be touched on the chest, genitals or anyplace else that makes you uncomfortable.
- It is important [*for ex-cult members and those who have been traumatised or abused*] that the therapist interact with you during the session, but without telling you what to do.