

University Elite Provider Assessment

Assign 1 point if the step happened and 0 points if not

Assign 1 point to any questions that are not applicable to your appointment type

- Patient understood the cause of the symptoms before treatment was prescribed
- Patient understood how the prescribed treatment addresses the cause(s)
- The appointment discussion usually focuses on patient's specific situation
- The provider pushed the patient outside their comfort zone
- The provider was NOT positive for any more than one bias criteria
- The provider pushed the patient to look inward
- The patient was encouraged to express anger when they were mad at the provider

Scoring

7 points = Elite: This generally indicates that a provider has advanced expertise. They generally can treat cases from mild to severe complexity. These individuals are likely experts and are highly sought out instructors or mentors.

6 points = Very Good: This also generally indicates that a provider has advanced expertise. They generally have the expertise to treat cases from mild to severe complexity.

5 points = Adequate: This generally indicates that a provider has average expertise and will work for many people. They generally can comfortably treat cases from mild to moderate complexity.

4 points or less = Minimal: This generally indicates that a provider is limited in their expertise. They generally should be limited to mild complexity cases.

"There's a lot of therapy and psychiatry out there... And if you look hard enough, some of it is good." Dr. Hans Watson D.O.

Just because your previous mental health care didn't fully heal you, doesn't mean that you are defective or that your situation is hopeless. Instead, it likely means that your previous mental health provider was not a good fit for your situation or that you weren't ready. We will discuss why and how you can assess whether a mental health provider is right for you. How to evaluate if the patient is ready will be addressed in another article.

WARNING: Before I explain how to assess whether your mental health provider is the right for your needs, I must emphasize an important point. I was blessed to receive world class training that established a foundation that very few providers receive. After many years and thousands of hours of additional study, I was able to build on that foundation to obtain my current level of expertise.

I recognize how blessed I am to have my training and don't intend to belittle any mental health provider for not being appropriate to treat some complex or severe conditions. Most providers do the best they can with their level of training and the absurd constraints imposed by insurance companies. When a mental health provider isn't right to treat you, it's generally not their fault.

There are many training programs that are not long enough or do not teach their students to understand the why behind mental health symptoms. Furthermore, these programs often fail to teach their students when a condition's severity requires more expertise. This often results in their graduates being unaware of their limitations.

These graduates often become providers that unknowingly accept patients that are more severe or complex than their training can handle. While they are able to provide the patient some temporary relief, they fail to identify or directly address the cause of the problem. This is why many patients leave treatment still wondering what caused their symptoms or why the treatment was appropriate. While this is unfortunate, this situation is much different than the provider being careless or unprofessional.

There are very few mental health providers that are uncaring, lack the necessary intelligence/talent or are unwilling to work hard enough to help their patients. Instead, they are usually doing the best they can with the training they received.

While I intend to show utmost respect for all mental health professionals, I also intend to provide you with a basic assessment that can be used to evaluate whether your care might require a doctor with more expertise. In that case, you should respectfully seek a provider that fits your needs.

Let's look at some general criteria that you should consider as a baseline necessity for mental health treatment. These criteria generally apply to individual care, marriage therapy and family therapy equally.

Assessment Explanations

SUMMARY OF CONTENTS

Use of this assessment does not constitute an endorsement or rejection of any provider by University Elite PLLC. This assessment is a general guideline based on our opinion and intended for internal assessment of our own providers. This assessment is not an appropriate resource for standard of care evaluations. Every patient has a responsibility to seek the best care available and to make their own judgement of whether a provider's care is appropriate for their exact situation.

- Experience is not the same as expertise
- You should understand the “the why” before treatment is prescribed
- The discussion should focus on your specific situation
- A good provider should push you outside your comfort zone
- The provider should not have a bias
- Your provider should push you to look inward
- Your provider should teach you to express your anger toward them in a healthy way

Experience is not the same as expertise

Even though this is not used for scoring a provider, the first thing to make clear is that you should never assume experience equals expertise. While providers become more comfortable with their chosen techniques as they gain experience, this is not always a good thing.

If a technique is appropriate for the situation it is good to practice using it and becoming better at applying the correct technique for that situation. If the technique is inappropriate for the situation, the provider will also become more comfortable using the wrong technique. Thus, experience is not the same as expertise.

Expertise means that the provider has the knowledge and understanding of which techniques/evaluations are appropriate in a given situation. Some providers mistakenly assume that their inappropriate application of techniques is acceptable and solidify this in appropriate habits. Furthermore, they incorrectly assume that having a full schedule and seeing temporary relief in their patients is evidence of effective care. Thus, they keep giving inferior care that sometimes makes the long term mental health worse.

A person cannot tell if a provider has expertise by simply looking at credentials. Like everything in life, there are good and bad examples of every type of mental health provider. I know psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers and licensed counselors that have developed expertise, know their limits and successfully help many people. Conversely, I know many more who have no insight to their training limitations, assume experience is the same as expertise and patients with severe symptoms often get worse after their care.

Ultimately, we need to stop assuming that experience or credentials are the same as expertise. Instead assess the provider by the individual criteria below. It will likely help you to find someone who has the expertise to work with your specific situation.

You should understand the the why before treatment is prescribed

One of the easiest ways to tell if someone has the expertise to handle your care is whether or not they tell you “the why” that is causing your symptoms and explain why the treatment addresses those causes. While this takes more time and expertise, it always makes a difference for your healing.

Understanding “the why” will always empower you to be part of the decision making process. When you and your provider share the decision making process, your healing and long term wellness improve drastically.

If you understand what caused the symptoms, how to overcome them and how to avoid them in the future, you will be empowered to stay healthy. Additionally, understanding the why

takes away your feeling of being completely helpless against mental illness and gives you the power to change unhealthy behaviors. You will also have the insight to seek the proper care before the problem becomes severe.

If you can: 1) identify a specific action or condition that results in you feeling this way. 2) Explain the neurobiological changes and how certain actions or conditions resulted in these changes. 3) Explain how the prescribed treatment directly treats the cause.... Then you likely have a provider with the right expertise for your situation.

The discussion should focus on your specific situation

When your needs exceed a provider's expertise, many will unconsciously guide the discussion to nonspecific generalized topics. This red flag indicates that you might need a provider with more advanced skills. Here's a list of some ways this can show up.

- Become so focused on following a medication regimen or therapy protocol that they no longer adjusts to your changing situation
- Give assignments or homework but fail to follow up or utilize the results to increase your understanding of what is going on
- Limit your ability to bring up certain topics without explaining why that topic is not productive for your current stage of treatment
- Start to talk about diagnosis without explaining the why.
 - For example: *"you have a chemical imbalance,"* but never telling you what caused the chemical imbalance or why a medication restores this imbalance

A good provider should appropriately push you outside your comfort zone

The purpose of psychotherapy is to establish a safe place where you can identify, confront and overcome painful truths without needing to assign blame. Some providers will allow you to stay in your comfort zone much longer than is needed or beneficial. When they enable you to avoid confronting painful unconscious truths, they are prolonging the duration of your misery.

While allowing you to avoid the uncomfortable truths will be easier in the short term, it has terrible long term results. Mental health care that does not push a person outside their comfort zone results in you becoming emotionally weaker and dependent on a provider to feel good. Additionally, you will have missed the opportunity to develop resiliency where a professional can be there to ensure that you are still safe while outside your comfort zone.

Here are a few examples of warning signs that indicate a provider that lacks enough expertise to safely help you leave your comfort zone and progress:

- Allowing you to apply extreme labels. This is commonly seen by allowing you to label things as all good or all bad. Another way to think of it is allowing you to paint people or things as black or white with no grey. Painting others as either all good or all bad is the enemy to resiliency because life is full of situations where good and bad are mixed.
 - Allowing extreme labels to be applied is especially harmful in couples and family therapy

- Allowing you to ignore poor reactions that began after being a victim because the provider fears they might be perceived as blaming the victim.
 - A provider should have enough expertise to be able to guide a victim to see these problematic behaviors without making the victim feel guilty.

Because I push my patients to grow, they generally have a love hate relationship with me. They hate that therapy sessions continually push them to confront difficult realities and learn to stop doing things that cause dysfunction. But, they love the growth/strength that our sessions create, they appreciate that I see their faults and that I still accept them as good people.

When I finish therapy with my patients, they often cry tears of joy as they admit that they hated how I pushed them to the point of discomfort. Then they thank me for helping them become stronger and happier than they thought was possible. It was only through being forced out of their comfort zone that they grew. It is the same for you.

You will only live a happy, healthy and confident life if your provider causes you to build new emotional muscles.

The provider should not have a bias

A good provider is someone who understands you, feels your emotions and still remains independent & objective. This is a difficult task because we all have struggles or experiences that predispose us to a bias.

Patients with complex or severe symptoms require a provider with advanced training. This advanced training helps the provider to recognize their own experiences and ensure they don't allow their own experiences to result in a bias with that patient.

A provider with a bias will lack objectivity and independence. This creates blind spots for you and your provider. Blind spots result in failures to recognize and grow in the areas most likely causing you pain and to limit your potential.

A bias is particularly damaging when a provider brings it into couples or family therapy. That is why I believe that a couples or family provider should be the best trained available. Here are some clear signs of bias:

- Declaring something to be true without having personal experience with such
 - This bias is often seen in couples therapy where a therapist lacking expertise will tell one individual they are wrong without having any evidence except "hearsay" from the other individual
- The provider allows a patient to believe they are a complete victim with nothing to change.
- The therapist meets with one individual, from a couple, more than the other
- The couples therapist defends one partner when there are no safety issues that require outside intervention
 - (Note that when there are safety concerns, the provider should no longer remain independent. They should take on any bias that engages outside help to reduce safety risk.)

- The provider tries to force common generalities or other situations to fit in your situation
- The provider establishes words or phrases that are forbidden or mandatory without the patient(s) agreeing to these boundaries
- The therapist makes conclusions for the patient or one individual in a couple
 - This is different than interpreting and asking if it applies to their situation

One caution to patients. You should not assume the provider has a bias just because they push you to address a topic you are avoiding or because they had one single positive criteria above. Pushing you to address a painful topic is part of good therapy and one or less positive criteria is acceptable for the well trained providers.

Your provider should push you to look inward

Therapy should be a place where you identify your role in a situation, or in the case of victimization, how your reaction might be causing further pain. If a provider allows you to only focus on how other people have hurt you and doesn't push you to identify your behaviors (before or after the injury) that are causing further pain, they are weakening your ability to self-reflect or grow emotionally stronger.

Your provider should teach you to express your anger toward them in a healthy way

All human healthy relationships will have times of disagreement that cause someone to be hurt and they will respond with anger. Therapy is the place where we should learn how to recognize, express and accept anger without causing an irreparable injury. This ability to express or accept anger in a healthy way is the foundation to all healthy relationships.

While it requires a basic level of expertise, the ability to help patients learn healthy ways to deal with anger is a foundational part of any therapy. This is called a "therapeutic rupture."

Many elite providers believe that all good therapy requires a therapeutic rupture before true growth can happen. This is where you will finally learn to deal with true anger and not need to sever all contact with the offending party. While this is uncomfortable for everyone involved, it is one of the safest places to learn a talk through strong emotions while maintaining the relationship.

Inadequately trained providers often unconsciously avoid topics or interpretations that will anger their patients. Or, they will not help their patients to identify the anger they feel toward the provider. This is often because the provider hasn't been trained adequately. Here are a few signs to look for.

- They become defensive when you express anger toward them instead of encouraging you to explain more?
- Do they avoid talking about topics that will cause you to feel angry?
 - allow you to stay in your comfort zone.
- Do they avoid exploring an item that you both know to be true but has previously made you angry?