

## Tips for First Responders Choosing Behavioral Health Services

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Because of the unique stressors of Emergency Services and Law Enforcement work, First Responders may be confused about how to choose behavioral health services for themselves and their family members. The tips in this document are designed to answer some of the usual concerns and questions of first responders.

1. First, have a pencil and paper handy to jot down your questions as you watch a short nine-minute youtube video. It is by Anne Bisek and called “When to Seek Therapy” ([www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykKR9t7R0t0](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykKR9t7R0t0)). It is specifically for first responders.
2. Ask a trusted colleague or Peer Support Team Member if they know someone who can guide you in choosing a counselor/therapist. The Employee Assistance Network (EAN) is geared to help with all types of referrals; the service is free; and it is strictly confidential. They can assist you in finding a good “fit” for you and your family members. If you work in an agency with an “Embedded Behavioral Health Specialist,” that person can help you also.
3. Decide what factors are most important to you in a BHS (Behavioral Health Specialist) and make a list. Some that First Responders often look for are :
  - Similar work/life experiences (military, LE, combat vet, firefighter, emergency medicine, nursing, social work, etc).
  - Gender/Age ( ie. men might prefer a male counselor of a similar age/era to their own or just the opposite!).
  - Specific area of expertise (marriage/relationship/family counseling, trauma, addictions, grief/loss, PTSD, etc).
4. You will likely have many questions about insurance coverage, co-pays, length of time the work might take, confidentiality of records, what the letters after their name mean, etc. As you are investigating counselors,

**you might find many of the answers to your questions on their website. If you decide to try one session with a person to see if you have “good fit” and rapport together, ask them to go over their PROFESSIONAL DISCLOSURE STATEMENT. This is a written document required by counselor licensure boards to insure that the client is well-informed about what to expect in the counseling relationship. Don’t hesitate to ask all your questions when you read over the statement. Counselors expect those questions and are happy to answer them fully. If you decide to enter into a counseling relationship with a therapist, they will give you a copy and ask you to sign that you understand/agree to the terms. There will be other forms and paperwork also, so keep asking any questions you may have about procedures, releases, etc. You are the CONSUMER/CLIENT and you have important rights as well as responsibilities in that capacity. You want nothing to hinder an open, trusting relationship with your Behavioral Health Specialist!**

- 5. Observe diplomas, certifications, licenses and books/materials in the counselor’s office. Ask if they lend reading material to clients and ask about the materials and therapies they find most helpful for clients with the issues you want to work on. Learn all you can about your issues and be ACTIVE in your treatment instead of passive. Ask the counselor what they expect from a serious client.**
- 6. Ask medication questions. Ask their beliefs about medication and share your thinking also. The counselor will likely cover that in depth in the “intake” interview/paperwork also. Since we know there is an intimate connection among the aspects of physical, cognitive, emotional, spiritual and behavioral, most counselors want a picture of the “whole” person as well as a family history. This complete picture helps them offer you the best help and supports.**
- 7. If you search online for information related to First Responders and your issues, go only to reputable sites such as the Veterans Administration website, Badge of Life, Firefighter’s Association, NC/SC LEAP, and the International Critical Incident Stress Foundation.**

**8. To learn more about the “Buncombe County Peer Response Network” now called the WNC PEER SUPPORT NETWORK, look at our 30-minute video on youtube by the same name or go to Buncombe County Government TV.**