FLORA BOURDILLON

Finding the right therapist

Exploring therapy and choosing support

Information and places to turn

For people aged 16 and over

Flora Bourdillon

BABCP-accredited Psychotherapist

Getting started

I truly believe there is a therapist and an approach out there for everybody. Finding the right fit can take time.

About this guide

These resources are starting points for your own exploration, not individual recommendations or endorsements. This is not an exhaustive guide: there are hundreds of therapies, with established or developing research behind them.

A qualified clinician should understand your goals, difficulties and history before considering whether an approach is safe, suitable and needs adapting.

What happens at the first appointment?

You will usually talk about what brought you to therapy, what you want help with and any relevant experiences. The therapist may ask about your life, relationships and previous support. You can ask questions too. You do not have to know which therapy you need.

How do I know if we are a good fit?

Trust can take time. Notice whether you feel listened to, respected and involved in decisions. Can you say when something does not feel right? A therapist may misunderstand you sometimes; being able to talk it through matters.

Questions you could ask

• What training do you have, and have you worked with difficulties like mine?

• Are you registered or accredited? Do you have regular supervision from another clinician?

• What would sessions involve? Would I practise things between appointments?

• Why might this approach help me? How will we review whether it is helping?

• Can you adapt sessions for my needs, including neurodivergence or disability?

• What does it cost, are reduced fees available, and what is the cancellation policy?

• How often would we meet, for how long, and online or in person?

You can review your options

You are allowed to ask questions, have preferences and change direction. If therapy has not helped, that is useful information, not a personal failure. You can discuss a different focus, approach or therapist.

Checking who you see

What do the titles mean?

Counselling gives you space to talk about what is troubling you with someone who listens without judging. It often focuses on something happening now, such as a loss, relationship difficulty or work stress. Together, you explore your feelings and what might help.

Psychotherapy can help you understand difficulties that keep coming back, such as patterns in relationships or how you feel about yourself. You may explore how past experiences affect your life now. This can involve working together over a longer period.

There is no clear dividing line: counselling can explore the past, and psychotherapy can focus on a current issue. Ask the therapist how they work and what might suit you.

Clinical and counselling psychologists have specialist postgraduate training and are regulated by the HCPC. Depending on their training and role, they may offer assessment, diagnosis and therapy.

Check training and registration

Some professional titles are protected by law. “Counsellor” and “psychotherapist” are not. Check the person’s qualifications, registration and training in the therapy they offer. An introductory course is different from specialist training.

For regulated professions, check the official register. Other therapists may belong to voluntary registers. The Professional Standards Authority (PSA) accredits some of these. Still check the individual’s experience and suitability for your needs.

HCPC - Check the Register

Professional Standards Authority - Accredited Registers

Where to look

These directories are starting points. Check the person’s training and registration as well as their listing.

BACP - counsellors and psychotherapists

UKCP - psychotherapists, including family therapists

BABCP - accredited CBT therapists

BPS - chartered psychologists

Counselling Directory - a broad UK search

Psychology Today - UK therapist search

Hub of Hope - find mental health support near you

What does “evidence-based” mean?

It means research has looked at whether a treatment helps. The strength of that research varies. NICE publishes treatment guidance, but no approach suits everyone. Ask why the therapist thinks it could help you.

NICE - research-based treatment guidance

There are hundreds of different therapies. This guide introduces some of them; it is not an exhaustive list.

Some therapies have a clear structure and include practice between sessions. Others are more open-ended. Your therapist should explain how you will work together.

CBT | Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

CBT looks at how thoughts, feelings, body sensations and actions affect each other. You work together to understand patterns, try different responses and practise changes between sessions.

CBT is often offered as an initial, time-limited treatment for anxiety and depression. It can include emotional processing and past experiences, but a brief course may leave less time to explore long-standing feelings and relationship patterns. Longer-term therapy, including private therapy if affordable, may offer more space for this.

Mind - CBT

NHS - CBT

BABCP - Find out more

ACT | Acceptance and Commitment Therapy

ACT helps you make room for difficult thoughts and feelings while taking steps towards what matters to you. Sessions may include mindfulness, exploring your values and trying small changes. The aim is not to remove every uncomfortable feeling.

The Chelsea Psychology Clinic - ACT

Association for Contextual Behavioral Science - ACT

DBT | Dialectical Behaviour Therapy

DBT combines acceptance with practical skills for change. It can help with intense emotions, distress and relationships.

A full DBT programme may include individual therapy and group skills sessions over several months. DBT-informed skills sessions are different from the full programme. Ask which is being offered.

The Chelsea Psychology Clinic - DBT

Mind - DBT

MBCT | Mindfulness-Based Cognitive Therapy

MBCT combines CBT and mindfulness. It helps you notice thoughts and feelings and respond differently. It was developed particularly to help prevent repeated depression returning.

If focusing inwards feels overwhelming, tell your therapist. Shorter practices, movement or noticing your surroundings may suit you better.

The Chelsea Psychology Clinic - MBCT

NICE - Depression in adults

CFT | Compassion Focused Therapy

CFT helps you develop a kinder way of relating to yourself and others, especially when shame or self-criticism is strong. You may explore what leaves you feeling threatened and what helps you feel safe and settled.

The Chelsea Psychology Clinic - CFT

Compassionate Mind Foundation

Schema Therapy

Schema Therapy explores long-standing beliefs and emotional patterns, often shaped by early relationships and unmet needs. It may help you understand patterns that keep repeating in your life and try new ways of responding.

The Chelsea Psychology Clinic - Schema Therapy

Schema Therapy Works

Psychodynamic therapy and DIT

Psychodynamic therapy explores how earlier experiences and relationships affect you now, including patterns you may not yet notice. It can be brief or longer term.

Dynamic Interpersonal Therapy (DIT) is a brief, structured form developed for depression. It focuses on a relationship pattern that may be affecting your mood.

British Psychoanalytic Council - Find a therapist or clinic

The Chelsea Psychology Clinic - DIT

MBT | Mentalization-Based Therapy

MBT helps you make sense of your own and other people's thoughts and feelings, especially when emotions or relationships become confusing. Ask about the practitioner's specific training.

The Chelsea Psychology Clinic - MBT

Anna Freud Centre - Mentalization-Based Treatment

IPT | Interpersonal Therapy

IPT looks at the link between mood and relationships. It focuses on areas such as grief, disagreements, relationship difficulties or life changes. You agree a focus and a period of work together.

Couples, family and systemic therapies

These approaches look at difficulties within relationships and the wider world around you. Sessions may explore communication, roles and patterns between partners or family members. Some approaches are recommended for specific difficulties.

A few other names you may see

Cognitive Analytic Therapy (CAT) explores repeated relationship patterns and ways to change them.

Narrative Therapy explores the stories you hold about yourself and your experiences.

Body-oriented or somatic approaches pay attention to body sensations and how they connect with emotions. "Somatic" means relating to the body.

Research and training vary between these approaches. Ask what the therapist offers and why it may suit you.

ACAT - Cognitive Analytic Therapy

Trauma can follow a single event, repeated experiences or harm in relationships, including while growing up. Support should fit your needs and pace.

PTSD and complex PTSD

PTSD means post-traumatic stress disorder. Complex PTSD can also involve difficulties managing emotions, feelings of worthlessness or shame, and problems with trust and relationships.

Mind - Understanding PTSD

Mind - Understanding complex PTSD

Trauma-focused CBT

This is CBT adapted for PTSD and trauma-related difficulties. You work through memories and explore how the experience affects your thoughts, feelings and actions now. It is a recommended treatment for PTSD in certain circumstances.

NICE - PTSD recommendations

Mind - Treatment and support for trauma

EMDR

EMDR stands for Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing. You recall aspects of a traumatic experience while following guided eye movements or another alternating left-right activity. It is a recommended treatment for PTSD in certain circumstances.

Some therapists use EMDR for other difficulties. Ask about their training and the research supporting its use for your needs.

The Chelsea Psychology Clinic - EMDR

Mind - EMDR

EMDR Association UK - Find an accredited therapist

Attachment-informed EMDR

This brings ideas about early relationships, safety and connection into EMDR. You may also see it called attachment-focused EMDR. Ask about extra training and how it changes the work. Research is still developing.

Parnell Institute - Attachment-Focused EMDR

EMDR Focus - Find a therapist

IFS | Internal Family Systems

IFS uses the word “parts” for different sides of your inner experience, with their own feelings and needs. You explore them with curiosity and compassion, including what they may be trying to protect you from.

Research into IFS is developing. It is not currently a standard NICE-recommended treatment across common mental health difficulties. Ask about the therapist’s training and how they use it.

IFS Institute

IFS Institute - Practitioner Directory

IFS Institute - Certification information

No Bad Parts by Richard Schwartz - book information

You Are the One You’ve Been Waiting For by Richard Schwartz - book information

Person-Centred Therapy

You explore your experiences at your own pace, with a therapist who aims to understand and accept you. The relationship is central to the work.

Gestalt Therapy

You explore what you notice in the present, including feelings and relationships. Exercises may help you understand your experience more directly.

These are humanistic approaches: they value your experience and your ability to grow and change.

Some therapists combine approaches; this is often called integrative therapy.

Places to read more

These links explain therapy and support options. You can read a private clinic’s information without choosing its services.

Mind - therapy, counselling and finding support

NHS - mental health and talking therapies

The Chelsea Psychology Clinic - therapy explanations (private clinic)

Julia Samuel - finding a therapist (20-minute Instagram clip)

Julia Samuel is a psychotherapist and author. This fantastic 20-minute conversation with her daughter explores finding a therapist.

Finding affordable therapy

Free Psychotherapy Network

Low-income eligibility; checks vary by practitioner

Free or very low-fee places for people on low incomes or benefits. Contact individual therapists about financial criteria, any evidence required and available places. The network does not publish one financial test for every listing.

Provider information

Organisations offering longer term and low cost therapy

Directory; each service sets its own rules

The Free Psychotherapy Network also lists organisations. Inclusion does not mean every service or place is free or means-tested. Check each provider directly.

Provider information

Mosaic Minds at EACH Counselling and Support

Free for eligible groups; no published income test identified

For eligible adults 18+ in Hounslow or Hillingdon. The Hounslow route supports Black, Asian and minority ethnic communities, including refugees and people seeking asylum; the Hillingdon route supports refugees and people seeking asylum. Confirm full eligibility and availability directly.

Provider information

Reduced-fee therapy options

Mind Within at West London Mind

Income-related counselling fees

Adults 18+ in listed local boroughs. Counselling prices depend on income and employment circumstances. Ask which fee route applies; psychodynamic therapy has a separately published rate.

Provider information

Metanoia Counselling and Psychotherapy Service

Concessions based on circumstances

Supervised trainee therapy, online or in Ealing, usually for around six months. Reduced assessment charges for people receiving benefits and reduced session fees may apply. Ask what financial information is required.

Provider information

Phoenix Counselling

Sliding scale; formal evidence requirements not confirmed

Fees are discussed and agreed at the initial meeting according to what you can afford. A sliding scale and supported-fee range are published. Ask how eligibility for the supported fee is decided.

Provider information

Ealing Abbey Counselling Service

Income-related sliding scale

Fees depend on personal or family income. Priority is given to Ealing residents with an Ealing GP; neighbouring boroughs may be accepted when capacity allows. Confirm what income evidence is needed.

Provider information

The Minster Centre

Income and circumstances considered

Affordable therapy for adults 18+. The initial consultation charge differs for people in employment or receiving benefits; ongoing fees are agreed according to individual circumstances.

Provider information

Reduced-fee therapy options continued

Waterloo Community Counselling

Financial-circumstances sliding scale

For eligible adults 18+ in Greater London. Session fees are agreed according to finances, with lower rates for benefits, unemployment and full-time study. Separate assessment charges apply.

Provider information

The Psychosynthesis Trust

Low-cost service; financial test not confirmed

Counselling with supervised trainees. The public page checked did not establish current income bands or evidence requirements. Ask directly about eligibility, fees and concessions before booking.

Provider information

Help Counselling

Income-related sliding scale

Affordable counselling in person or online. Fees are linked to income; further reductions may be discussed according to circumstances. Ask about assessment charges and trainee or qualified-practitioner rates.

Provider information

The Bowlby Centre Blues Project

Financial eligibility checked

Longer-term, low-cost attachment-based psychotherapy for people meeting financial criteria. Its published information describes an income threshold and financial eligibility review. Confirm current limits, session frequency, fees and commitment.

Provider information

The Guild of Psychotherapists

Low-income eligibility; confirm assessment method

For adults 18+ on low incomes in Lambeth, Lewisham or Southwark. Weekly psychotherapy, in person or online, for up to two years. Ask about income thresholds, evidence, session fees and consultation charges.

Provider information

Reduced-fee therapy options continued

Centre for Community Psychotherapy London

Sliding scale based on financial capacity

Longer-term weekly therapy, usually requiring at least a one-year commitment. Ongoing fees reflect what you can contribute. Assessment charges have concessionary rates.

Provider information

British Psychotherapy Foundation

Individual financial circumstances considered

Low-fee weekly psychotherapy with experienced trainees, normally requiring a one-year minimum commitment. Ask about financial assessment, session fees and administration or consultation charges.

Provider information

AGIP Fairbridge Clinic

Low-income provision; current test needs confirmation

AGIP advertises low-fee and concessionary psychotherapy for adults on low incomes. The Fairbridge page could not be checked directly. Confirm the current clinic route, qualifying benefits, evidence and fees.

Provider information

Headstrong Counselling

Income-related fees

Weekly online trainee counselling with fees depending on income. Ask about assessment costs, age criteria and how income is assessed. Other services may have different rates.

Provider information

The Altering Group

Published income bands

Online counselling for adults 18+ with mild to moderate difficulties. Fees follow annual-income bands, with a free assessment. Check current suitability criteria and any evidence requirements.

Provider information

Centre for Better Health

Means-tested daytime concessions; proof required

For London adults 18+, in person. Reduced daytime fees depend on earnings, benefits or other qualifying circumstances and require proof. Evening fees are a fixed rate. Ask specifically about daytime concessions and assessment costs.

Provider information