

MONTH 8: AUGUST

Finding the Right Therapist: A Gentle Vetting Guide

[Content Warning: This article discusses clergy sexual abuse. Please take care of yourself. You can stop anytime.]

Not all therapists understand clergy sexual abuse. Some will minimize it. Some will blame you. Some will push forgiveness before you're ready. Finding the RIGHT therapist is critical to your healing. Here's how to vet therapists to ensure they're equipped to support you.

WHY REGULAR THERAPISTS AREN'T ENOUGH

Clergy sexual abuse has unique dynamics: • Spiritual trauma • Community loss • Power dynamics • Institutional betrayal • Religious shame A therapist who doesn't understand these may minimize or mishandle your experience.

VETTING QUESTIONS TO ASK

****Question 1:**** "Do you have experience with clergy sexual abuse or religious trauma?" Listen for: "Yes, I've worked with survivors specifically." Red flag: "All abuse is the same." ****Question 2:**** "How do you view the power dynamic between clergy and congregants?" Listen for: "It's a fiduciary relationship. Consent isn't possible." Red flag: "Well, they were both adults..." ****Question 3:**** "What's your approach to forgiveness?" Listen for: "Forgiveness is optional, not required." Red flag: "You need to forgive to heal." ****Question 4:**** "How do you handle situations where a client is considering reporting?" Listen for: "I support whatever decision you make." Red flag: Pressure either direction. ****Question 5:**** "Are you familiar with DARVO and institutional betrayal?" Listen for: "Yes, I understand how institutions protect abusers." Red flag: "What's DARVO?"

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Credentials: • LCSW, LPC, LMFT, or Psychologist Specializations: • Religious trauma • Spiritual abuse • Complex PTSD • Sexual trauma Modalities: • EMDR, somatic therapy, or trauma-focused CBT

WHERE TO FIND THESE THERAPISTS

• Psychology Today: Filter by "Religious Trauma" • Faith Trust Institute referral network • Survivor advocacy organizations may have referrals • Ask directly in consultations

IF YOUR CURRENT THERAPIST ISN'T WORKING

If your therapist minimizes, pushes forgiveness, or doesn't understand power dynamics — you can leave. You don't owe them continued business. Your healing deserves expert support.

RESOURCES: RAINN: 1-800-656-4673 | You deserve support. Take care. 