

Mental Health for Cancer Survivors

Why consider a mental health professional?

Survivorship can often be a difficult and challenging transition after your cancer treatment. You may experience changes in relationships, have challenges getting back to work, and feel a variety of complex emotions. You may experience guilt, fear of recurrence, grief, anger, sadness, or regret. Sometimes these can interfere with daily life. Cancer survivors may benefit from seeking out a mental health professional for therapy, counseling, and for help navigating these emotions.

Types of Mental Health Providers

- **Social Workers** have a master’s degree in social work (MSW), and can diagnose mental health disorders, and provide therapy.
- **Mental Health Counselors** have a master’s degree in counseling (MHC), and can diagnose mental health disorders, and provide therapy.
- **Psychologists** have a doctoral degree in psychology (PhD or PsyD), and can diagnose mental health disorders, and provide psychological testing and therapy.
- **Psychiatrists** are medical doctors (MD) who have specialized training in mental health and treatment. Psychiatrists can prescribe medications and may also provide therapy.

Getting Started

Insurance: Most people use insurance to help pay for mental health services since it can be expensive, ranging from \$90 to \$200 a visit. When you contact your insurance provider to learn about mental health services, be sure to find out:

- What services are covered? Is there a co-pay? How many sessions are covered?
- Can you use your insurance with any mental health provider or do you need to see a provider who is part of the insurance network?
- Does the insurance plan have a list of providers in your area? Often insurance companies have a feature to search for mental health providers on their website.

Talk with your primary care provider and ask about mental health professionals in your area. Ask if they can recommend specific professionals that are covered by your insurance. There are various other resources that you can use to identify an appropriate provider including:

MA Social Work Therapy Referral Service Therapy Matcher provides free, personalized, and confidential referrals to licensed social workers.	www.therapymatcher.org 1-800-242-9794 Email: info@therapymatcher.org
MA Psychological Association The MA Psychological Association (MPA) offers a “Find a Psychologist” service.	www.masspsych.org 781-263-0080
COMPASS Helpline at National Alliance of Mental Illness Massachusetts COMPASS is the information and referral helpline at NAMI Massachusetts.	www.namimass.org 617-704-6264 or 1-800-370-9085 Email: compass@namimass.org
William James INTERFACE Referral Service The William James INTERFACE Referral Service maintains a mental health referral help line.	interface.williamjames.edu 888-244-6843

After you have the names of two or three mental health providers that interest you, reach out. You will most likely go through an intake process in which you can:

- Talk about your concerns and ask about their areas of experience.
- Ask about availability, fees, and insurance.
- If you are satisfied with the answers and feel like it is a good fit, make an appointment.

During your first visit: Plan to describe the reasons that led you to seek help. The provider may ask you detailed questions about your personal and medical history. Ask the provider what kind of treatment they recommend and what other kinds of treatment might be available. Ask about expected benefits, length of treatment, and any side effects you might expect.

Find someone with whom you have rapport and feel you can trust. It often takes a few visits to be sure you have a good “fit” with the provider and for them to get to know you. Talk to the provider about your questions or concerns.

If you don't feel that you have a good fit with the provider, it is ok to be honest and talk to them about that. It is your treatment and the provider is there to help you. The provider may be able to change the approach to your therapy or help you find a therapist who is a better match for you.

Common Types of Mental Health Treatment

Medication can be used to as part of your mental health treatment. Treatment usually involves identifying some target symptoms and trying a medication to improve them. Medication is often combined with psychotherapy.

Psychotherapy or talk therapy involves talking with a therapist to help understand and resolve complex emotions. The most common types include:

- **Behavior therapy** focuses on trying to change patterns of behavior. Treatment often includes keeping records of concerns or symptoms, learning new behaviors, and learning relaxation and stress management. Behavior therapy may be used with cognitive therapy.
- **Cognitive therapy** focuses on identifying thought patterns that lead to troublesome feelings and behaviors. Treatment often involves recording problematic thoughts and developing new thought patterns.
- **Group therapy** brings together a group of people with a shared experience to work together for change. Treatment often includes group members discussing their experiences and getting feedback and support from one another.
- **Teletherapy** also called telepsychology, which allows you to talk to a therapist remotely through technology. Teletherapy commonly happens over phone calls, text messages, live chats, and video conversations.

Still have questions?

For more information, visit www.dana-farber.org/survivor or contact the Adult Survivorship Program at 617-632-4LAD (Life After Diagnosis) or dfci_adultsurvivors@dfci.harvard.edu

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