

# HOW TO APPROACH ONLINE THERAPY

STORY BY  
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**Figuring out how to get mental health therapy remotely can be challenging and intimidating. Here are some tips for getting the help you need.**

**GETTING HELP** is a difficult task. We first need the motivation to search and ask for help, then the pressure of waiting for an answer is daunting. A lot of people have the misconception that once you find a therapist, you are automatically on the right track. But what matters most is finding the right therapist that is catered to specific needs and communication style.

It's even harder when you're trying to navigate the new world of online therapy, brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic. Below, Dr. Christine Ricohermoso-Shiaw, a clinical counselor for the Cal State Long Beach Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS), shares her advice to get started on the search for the right online therapist.

# ONLINE THERAPY IS HARD FOR EVERYONE

Converting to online therapy has been a difficult transition. Some people feel comfortable behind a computer screen—and it is a convenient situation—but it limits detections a therapist can make.

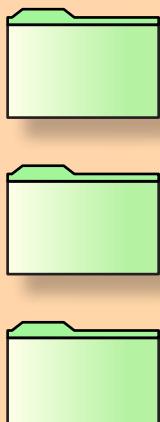
“We miss a lot of that pickup of energy, vibes and body language,” Ricohermoso-Shiaw said. “I think a lot can be hidden in virtual worlds that would be more clear in the office. Overall, I believe we are all doing the best we can given the current situation. I am happy students are coming in for support.”

Exploring mental health resources and therapy can be an invaluable experience, especially during society’s current times.

The pandemic has taken a toll on therapists too. They are receiving an overwhelming number of requests for help, so do not get discouraged if replies are infrequent. Reach out to multiple therapists, if necessary. For urgent cases, local warmline numbers are recommended. Scan the QR code for more information.



**THERAPY & MENTAL HEALTH ONLINE RESOURCES**  
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## UTILIZE WHAT IS AVAILABLE TO YOU

For CSULB students, CAPS offers a chance to explore individual therapy, identify short-term goals, join workshop groups and communicate with other students. Students can call CAPS any day at any time for crisis services, and all services are covered under the student health fee.

For those who do not have access to campus resources, health insurance providers also provide different therapy options depending on the situation.

“On the back of every insurance card, there should be a number for ‘behavioral health,’ Ricohermoso-Shiaw said. “When you call behavioral health, they will assess what you’re needing, and they will most likely give you a list of providers that are covered by your insurance company.”

Those recommendations then provide a step-by-step process to set up a consultation. Services and co-pay vary depending on the insurance company.

## PSYCHOLOGY TODAY AND OTHER RESOURCES

“Psychology Today is like a Yelp for psychologists,” Ricohermoso-Shiaw said. “Not all therapists are on there, but a good chunk of therapists are. They provide information about what kind of services they provide, the modality that they use, give you a welcome message, a sense of their personality, a picture and their price range.”

Psychology Today allows users to filter therapists by gender, training experience, religious preferences, online therapy availability, specific topics of interest and more. It also allows users to cross-reference their health insurance recommendations with Psychology Today’s listings to find the best match. Those who don’t have health insurance can also search for reduced-cost providers.

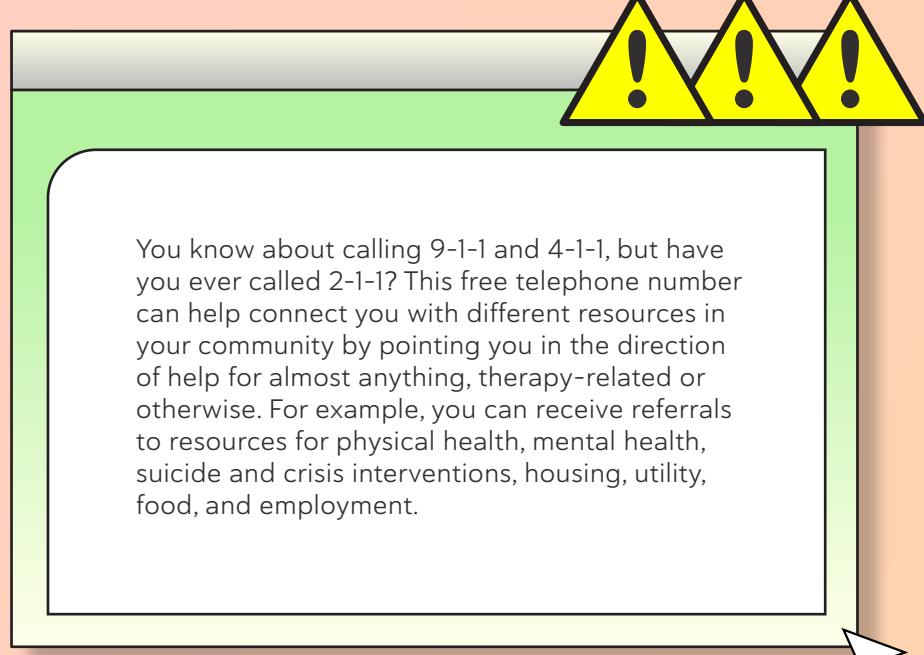


## HAVE AN OPEN MIND

Some people use therapy as an outlet to vent and unload. That is encouraged and can even be cathartic. However, it is important to be receptive to the guidance given in order to see change within each situation.

“The person should be aware that the therapist is there to help them,” Ricohermoso-Shiaw said. “The therapist is there to not judge them. The therapist is not there to give you advice. I think

The National Alliance on Mental Illness website can help connect users to groups or individual therapy, but make sure to check for local programs. One can call or visit the Long Beach Mental Health Services Adult Clinic for resources. Alternatively, LGBTQ+ centers, Catholic charities, Jewish community centers, and Asian American and Pacific Islander community centers periodically offer lower-cost therapy at their facilities.



that’s a common misconception that the therapist is going to tell you how to fix it. The therapist is not going to tell you how to fix it. The therapist is going to help you understand what you may need to do to improve that situation.”

Therapists oftentimes assign the patient with tasks in order to improve their situation. In order to see a difference, patients are encouraged to process that information and practice it.

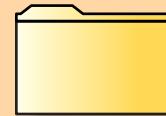
## SET A GOAL

Upon finding the right fit, April Tsuei, 23, a technical recruiter for Amazon and a University of California, San Diego alumna, identified which therapists didn't work for her based on what she wanted to get out of the experience.

"If you've never had a therapist before, I think you would want to think about: What would a good therapist look like to you and what are you trying to get out of your sessions?" Tsuei said. "Is it trying to work through your trauma? Is it trying to just vent to someone without feeling guilty and without having to censor yourself? Is it trying to understand some mindfulness techniques?"

It is best to begin the journey with a goal in mind, and it is important to be prepared to talk about different experiences that are the driving force for change. Without that, it's difficult for a therapist to help to their full extent.

Ultimately, therapy can provide the help needed for change. It may be challenging online, but with the right mindset and resources, it can make all the difference.



April Tsuei, 23, found the right therapist when she set a goal for her sessions.

