

Finding a therapist



Making it a
good fit for you!

As a scleroderma patient you already know the importance of being mindful of managing your symptoms and monitoring for changing. This process applies to your mental health as well, if you start to experience symptoms of a mental health condition, don't wait for them to get worse. Instead, reach out for help. To start, make an appointment with your family doctor or nurse practitioner. They can refer you to a specialist.

Keep in mind that it can sometimes be challenging to find a therapist who meets your needs. You might need to connect with more than one therapist before you find the right fit.

Consider these factors

Before you look for a therapist, you will want to know the answer to these questions:

- What type of a mental health support are you looking for?
- Are you looking for a healthcare provider who can offer therapy?
- Are you looking for someone who can prescribe medication?
- Are you looking for both medication and therapy?

Contact your insurance provider

If you have health insurance, call your insurance provider to learn if they cover mental health services. If they do, ask for the contact information of local service providers who accept your insurance plan. If you need support for a specific condition, ask for providers who treat that condition.

Other questions that you should ask your insurance provider include:

- Are all diagnoses and services covered?
- What are the copay and deductible amounts for these services?
- Can you make a direct appointment with a psychiatrist or therapist? Or do you need to see a primary care physician or nurse practitioner first for a referral?

It is always a good idea to ask for the names and contact information of multiple providers. The first provider you try might not be the right fit for you.

Look for therapists online

Your family doctor, nurse practitioner, and insurance provider can help you find a therapist in your area. You can also look for therapists online. For example, consider using these databases:

- [American Psychiatric Association: Find a Psychiatrist](#)

- [American Psychological Association: Psychologist Locator](#)
- [Anxiety and Depression Association of America: Find a Therapist](#)
- [Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance: Find a Pro](#)
- [International Obsessive Compulsive Disorder Foundation: Find Help](#)
- [SAMHSA: Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator](#)
- [Veterans Affairs: VA Certified Counselors](#)

Schedule an appointment

It's time to book an appointment. If you're reluctant to make the call, you can ask a friend or family member to call on your behalf. A few things to do:

1. If it's your first time visiting a therapist, let them know that. They may want to schedule a longer appointment to provide more time for introductions and diagnosis.
2. If the first available appointment time is far in the future, take that appointment time but ask to be put on a waiting list. If another patient cancels, you might get an earlier appointment. You can also call other therapists to learn if you can get an earlier appointment with them.
3. While you wait for your appointment, consider looking for other sources of support. For example, you might be able to find a support group in your area. If you're a member of a religious community, you might be able to get support from a pastoral counselor. Your school or workplace might also offer counseling services.

If you are in a crisis and need immediate help, go to a hospital emergency department or call 911.

Find the right fit

Once you have met with a therapist, it's time to reflect on whether they're the right fit for you. Here are some important things to consider:

- How much education and professional experience do they have? Have they worked with other people going through similar experiences or coping with a similar diagnosis? They should be qualified to provide the services that they are offering. Most of the providers discussed previously should have at least a master's degree, or in the case of psychologists, a doctoral degree.
- Do you feel comfortable with them? What “vibe” do you get from them? The personal questions that your therapist asks you might make you uncomfortable sometimes, but that person should not make you feel uneasy. You should feel like they are on your side.
- Do they understand and respect your cultural background and identity? Are they willing to learn more about your background and beliefs? Consider following NAMI's tips for [finding culturally competent care](#).
- What processes does the therapist expect you to follow to establish mental health goals and evaluate your progress? What kind of improvements can you expect to see? You may be more comfortable with one approach to providing care over another.
- How often will you meet? How hard will it be to get an appointment? Can you contact the therapist by

phone or email between appointments? If you can't see or talk to them as often as you need, another service provider might be better suited to you.

- Can you afford their services? If you're concerned about your ability to pay for appointments or meet your insurance copays or deductibles, bring it up with your therapist when you first meet them. Ask if you can pay on a sliding scale or at a discounted price. Doctors and therapists often prefer to prepare for potential financial challenges in advance because it's important to continue treatment without interruption.

If you feel uncomfortable with the first therapist that you visit, move on to the next one. It's not enough for them to be a qualified professional. You need to work well together. Developing a trusting relationship is critical to meeting your long-term treatment needs.

Can you get help online or by phone?

Distance therapy can be conducted by voice, text, chat, video, or email. Some therapists offer distance therapy to their patients when they're out of town. Others offer distance therapy as a stand-alone service. To learn more about distance counseling, visit the [American Distance Counseling Association](#).

Many hotlines, online information services, mobile apps, and even video games are available to help people cope with mental illness.

Hotlines

Many organizations run hotlines and online services to provide mental health support. These are just a few of the hotlines and online services that are available:

- [National Domestic Violence Hotline](#) offers phone support to people experiencing domestic violence.
- [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) offers phone support to people in emotional distress.
- [SAMHSA's National Helpline](#) provides treatment referrals and information support to people coping with substance abuse or other mental health conditions.
- [Veterans Crisis Line](#) provides support to veterans and their loved ones.

An online search will turn up more services in your area.

Mobile apps

A growing number of mobile apps are available to help people cope with mental illness. Some apps facilitate communication with therapists. Others offer links to peer support. Still others provide educational information or tools to promote good mental health.

You should not use mobile apps as a replacement for your doctor or therapist's prescribed treatment plan. But some apps might make a helpful addition to your larger treatment plan.

Free apps

- [Breathe2Relax](#) is a portable stress management tool. It provides detailed information on how stress affects the body. It also helps users learn how to manage stress using a technique called diaphragmatic breathing. It's available for free on iOS and Android devices.
- [IntelliCare](#) is designed to help people manage depression and anxiety. The IntelliCare Hub app and related mini apps are available for free on Android devices.
- [MindShift](#) is designed to help youth gain insight into anxiety disorders. It provides information about generalized anxiety disorder, social anxiety disorder, specific phobias, and panic attacks. It also provides tips for developing basic coping strategies.
- [PTSD Coach](#) was designed for veterans and military service members who have PTSD. It provides information about PTSD, including treatment and management strategies. It also includes a self-assessment tool. It's available for free on iOS and Android devices.
- [SAM: Self Help for Anxiety Management](#) provides information about managing anxiety. It's available for free on iOS and Android devices.
- [TalkSpace](#) seeks to make therapy more accessible. It connects users to licensed therapists, using a messaging platform. It also provides access to public therapy forums. It's free to download on iOS and Android devices.
- [Equanimity](#) is a meditation app. It may help you develop a stress-relieving meditation practice. It's available to download for \$4.99 on iOS devices.

- [Lantern](#) offers sessions designed to boost emotional well-being. It's a subscription-based service. (Email [customer support](#) for current pricing.) Although the service is web-based, you can also download a free supplemental app for iOS devices.
- [Worry Watch](#) is designed to help users document and manage experiences with chronic worry, anticipatory anxiety, and generalized anxiety disorder. It's available on iOS for \$1.99.

Paid apps

For information about other mental health apps, visit the [Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#).

Video game therapy

Video gaming is a popular leisure activity. Certain doctors also use video games for therapeutic purposes. In some cases, immersing yourself in virtual worlds might help you take a break from everyday anxieties.

Q:

How can you use video games as a form of therapy?

Anonymous

A:

What makes this practice unique is that it's not the gaming that is the emphasis. We're practitioners. We see kids, adolescents, and adults who come in with various issues or concerns — whether they're anxious, depressed, or struggling with school problems or relationships — and we see that games have provided a way for people to cope. *Elizabeth Messer, LCSW-R, co-director of [Electronic Gaming Therapy](#).* Answers represent the opinions of our

medical experts. All content is strictly informational and should not be considered medical advice.

Some game designers have created games specifically geared toward mental health. For example:

- [Depression Quest](#) aims to help people with depression understand that they're not alone. It also illustrates how the condition can affect people.
- [Luminosity](#) uses games to strengthen players' cognitive abilities.
- [Project EVO](#) was designed to provide daily therapy to people with brain disorders, such as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and autism.
- [Sparx](#) is a role-playing game. It strives to promote positive affirmations through interactions among players. It's currently available only in New Zealand.
- [SuperBetter](#) aims to increase resilience. This is the ability to stay strong, motivated, and optimistic in the face of difficult obstacles.

Ask your doctor for more information about the potential benefits and risks of video gaming.

Can nonprofit organizations help?

Whether you are grieving the loss of a loved one or coping with mental illness, many nonprofit organizations offer support. Consider connecting with one of the organizations listed below. Or conduct an online search to find an organization in your area.

- [Alliance of Hope for Suicide Loss Survivors](#) provides support to suicide survivors. It also helps those who've lost a loved one to suicide.
- [American Foundation for Suicide Prevention](#) provides resources to people affected by suicide.
- [Candle Inc.](#) offers programs designed to prevent substance abuse.
- [Child Mind Institute](#) provides support to children and families coping with mental health and learning disorders.
- [Children's Health Council](#) provides support services to children and families coping with a variety of mental health and learning disorders.
- [Finding Balance](#) is a Christian organization. It strives to help people develop a healthy relationship with food and weight.
- [Hope of Survivors](#) offers support to victims of clergy sexual abuse and misconduct. It also provides education to clergy and churches.
- [Knights of Heroes Foundation](#) runs an annual wilderness adventure camp for children who've lost their parents during military service.
- [Mental Health America](#) is dedicated to promoting good mental health among Americans. It promotes prevention, diagnosis, and treatment for people at risk of mental illness.
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) promotes the well-being of Americans affected by mental illness. It offers education and support resources.
- [National Child Traumatic Stress Network](#) strives to improve care for children and youth who've been exposed to traumatic events.

- [National Federation of Families for Children's Mental Health](#) promotes policies and services to support families of children and youth who are coping with emotional, behavioral, or mental health challenges.
- [Treatment Advocacy Center](#) promotes policies and practices to improve psychiatric care. It also supports research on mental illnesses.
- [The Trevor Project](#) provides support for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and questioning (LGBTQ) youth. It focuses on crisis and suicide prevention.
- [Soaring Spirits International](#) offers peer-based support programs to people coping with grief.
- [Sober Living America](#) provides structured living environments for people who are trying to recover from alcohol and drug abuse.
- [Washburn Center for Children](#) provides support to children with behavioral, emotional, and social problems.

To find more nonprofit organizations that focus on mental health, visit:

- [Charity Navigator](#)
- [Great Nonprofits](#)
- [GuideStar Mental Health Nonprofit Directory](#)
- [MentalHealth.gov](#)

Can support groups help?

Support groups focus on a wide variety of conditions and experiences. In a support group, you can share your experiences with others and give and provide emotional support. To start your search, consider exploring these links:

- [Al-Anon/Alateen](#) runs meetings for friends and family members of people with a history of alcohol abuse.
- [Alcoholics Anonymous](#) runs meetings for people with a history of alcohol abuse.
- [Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#) maintains a directory of support groups for people with anxiety and depression.
- [Attention Deficit Disorder Association](#) offers support group services to members of the organization.
- [The Compassionate Friends](#) provides support to families that have lost a child.
- [Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance](#) runs meetings for people with depression and bipolar disorder.
- [Dual Recovery Anonymous](#) runs meetings for people who have both substance abuse issues and an emotional or psychiatric illness.
- [Gamblers Anonymous](#) runs meetings for people with gambling problems, as well as their family members and friends.

- [Gift From Within](#) maintains a directory of support groups for people with PTSD, as well as their family members and friends.
- [International Obsessive Compulsive Disorder Foundation](#) maintains a directory of support groups for people with OCD, as well as their loved ones.
- [Mental Health America](#) maintains a directory of peer support programs for people with different mental health conditions.
- [Narcotics Anonymous](#) runs meetings for people with a history of drug addiction.
- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#) runs meetings for people with mental illness.
- [National Eating Disorders Association](#) maintains a directory of support groups for people with eating disorders.
- [Overeaters Anonymous](#) runs in-person, telephone, and online meetings for people with a history of disordered eating, such as food addiction.
- [Postpartum Support International](#) runs meetings for families coping with perinatal mood and anxiety disorders, such as postpartum depression.
- [S-Anon International Family Groups](#) runs meetings for family and friends of people with a sexual addiction. It offers in-person, online, and phone meetings.
- [Scleroderma Foundation Michigan Chapter](#), www.scleroderma.org/michigan, runs various in-person and virtual groups. Telephone support is also available to those living with scleroderma. SFMC also has support for parents of juvenile scleroderma patients.

- [Sex Addicts Anonymous](#) runs meetings for people with a sexual addiction. It facilitates in-person, online, and phone meetings.
- [Survivors of Incest Anonymous](#) runs meetings for people who've survived incest.
- [Well Spouse Association](#) facilitates support groups for people who act as caregivers for partners with a chronic illness.

Can local services help?

You might be able to find local organizations that provide mental health support in your area. Ask your doctor, nurse practitioner, or therapist for information about local services. You can also check the bulletin boards and resources at clinics, hospitals, libraries, community centers, and other sites. They often provide information about local organizations, programs, and events.

Many of the organizations listed in the "[Finding therapy](#)," "[Nonprofit organizations](#)," and "[Support groups](#)" sections of this article operate local chapters. Some of them maintain directories of local services. For example, Mental Health America maintains a directory of [local services](#) and [affiliates](#). [MentalHealth.gov](#) and [SAMHSA](#) also maintain directories of local services.

If you can't find local support, consider exploring the resources listed in the "[Online and phone](#)" section.

Can hospitalization or inpatient care help?

Types of care

Depending on your condition, you might receive the following care:

- If you receive outpatient care, you'll generally be treated at an office, without staying overnight at a hospital or other treatment center.
- If you receive inpatient care, you'll stay overnight at a hospital or other treatment center to get treatment.
- If you undergo partial hospitalization, you'll receive treatment over the course of multiple days, generally for several hours each day. However, you won't stay overnight at the hospital or other treatment center.
- If you receive residential care, you'll be admitted to a residential setting and live there on a temporary or ongoing basis. You'll be able to access 24-hour support there.

You can look for treatment facilities online. For example:

- AlcoholScreening.org maintains a directory of treatment programs for people with alcoholism.
- [American Residential Treatment Association](http://AmericanResidentialTreatmentAssociation) maintains a directory of residential treatment facilities.
- [Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance](http://DepressionandBipolarSupportAlliance) allows you to search for facilities that have been recommended by other people with mental illness.

- [SAMHSA](#) provides a tool for locating behavioral health treatment services. It can help you find facilities that treat substance abuse or other mental health conditions.

For additional directories, explore the resources listed in the “Finding therapy” section.

If you cannot afford a private psychiatric hospital, ask your doctor for information about public psychiatric hospitals. They often provide acute and long-term care to people who would have financial difficulties paying for treatment.

Psychiatric hold

Psychiatric hold is a procedure that allows healthcare professionals to hold patients at a treatment center. You may be put on a psychiatric hold under the following conditions:

- You intend to harm someone else or pose a danger to other people.
- You intend to harm yourself or pose a danger to yourself.
- You’re unable to meet your basic needs for survival due to mental illness.

Mental health professionals will examine you to determine a diagnosis. They may offer you crisis counseling, medications, and referrals for follow-up care. Laws vary by state in terms of involuntary admission, but you may be held anywhere from a few hours to a few weeks, depending on the severity of your symptoms.

If you think you might pose an immediate risk to your own safety or someone else's, go to a hospital emergency department or call 911.

Psychiatric advance directive

If you have a severe mental health condition, consider establishing a psychiatric advance directive (PAD). A PAD is also known as a mental health advance directive. It is a legal document that you can prepare when you're in a mentally competent state to outline your preferences for treatment in the case of a mental health crisis.

A PAD can potentially help you do the following:

- Promote your autonomy.
- Improve communications between you, your family, and your healthcare providers.
- Protect you from ineffective, unwanted, or potentially harmful interventions.
- Reduce the use of involuntary treatment or safety interventions, such as restraints or seclusion.

There are multiple types of PAD. Some examples:

- An instructive PAD provides written instructions about the specific treatments that you would like to receive if you experience a crisis that leaves you unable to make decisions.
- A proxy PAD names a healthcare proxy or agent to make treatment decisions on your behalf in cases when you are unable to do so yourself.

If you decide to establish a proxy PAD, choose a family member, spouse, or close friend who you trust to advocate

for you. It is important to discuss your wishes with them before designating them as your proxy. They will be in charge of your care and treatment plans. They need to fully understand your wishes to act as an effective proxy.

For more information on PADs, visit the [National Resource Center on Psychiatric Advance Directives](#) or [Mental Health America](#).

International sources

If you're outside of the United States, you might find the list of resources at the [Centre for Global Mental Health](#) website helpful.

As well, try the links below for mental health resources if you happen to be in one of these countries:

Canada

- [Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health](#) strives to advance policy discussion on mental health.
 - [Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention](#) maintains a directory of local crisis centers, including many that offer phone support.
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- [eMental Health](#) maintains a database of crisis hotlines across the country.

<https://www.healthline.com/health/mental-health-resources#inpatient-and-hospital-care>