

# THERAPY or COACHING:

*What is right for you and how do you choose a good practitioner?*

Sound Advice from Coach  
Dr. Lisabeth Saunders Medlock



## ***Do I need a therapist or a coach?***

Although they both involve a dialogue between a person and a practitioner, coaching and therapy are different. Coaching is about the future; it is moving forward and supporting growth in the pursuit of individual goals. Therapy/counseling focuses on healing and dealing with past issues or mental health problems and diagnoses. There are other distinctions between therapy and coaching. For example, coaching is about achievement, action, momentum and creating, while therapy is about healing, understanding, safety and resolving. Whether you choose coaching or therapy depends on your goals. If you are depressed, anxious or need to deal with issues from your past to heal, you probably need counseling. If you are at a crossroads where you need to gain clarity and set goals to help you move forward or have a specific problem you would like to solve, coaching may be right for you.

## ***How do I know a therapist or coach is trained?***

There are many types of therapists/counselors and many types of coaches. For therapists/counselors look for someone who is licensed in the state or territory in which he or she practices. Psychologists have to have a valid license before they call themselves "psychologists." For clinical social workers, they will generally have an "L" in front of their degree (LCSW). You should stay away from individuals who don't have at least a master's degree. Avoid "counselors" who have little or no formal training, or titles that are not easily recognizable. In South Carolina, the Department of Labor, Licensing and Regulation licenses social workers (LMSW, LISW), marriage and family therapists (LMFT) and professional counselors (LPC). Ask the therapist if you are unsure. No professional or ethical therapist should mind being asked about his or her educational or professional background.

Many coaches are accredited by the International Coaching Federation (ICF). There are Certified Life Coaches (CLC), Associate Certified Coaches (ACC), Professional Certified Coaches (PCC) and Master Certified Coaches (MCC). Your coach should have some certification or be working toward certification through an accredited ICF program. In addition to life coaches, who tend to deal with a broad range of clients and issues, there are many different types of

specialty coaching, such as business and executive coaching to wellness and spirituality coaching.

## ***How do I find a good therapist or coach?***

Whether you are looking for a coach or a therapist/counselor, you must find a practitioner with whom you feel comfortable and can trust. This means screening them until you find the one that is right for you. There are essential skills a coach or therapist should demonstrate to the highest standard such as listening, questioning, building rapport and the capacity to inspire and help you gain clarity.

Second, you should seek out a therapist or coach with specific experience with your issue. Ask point-blank questions about the therapist's or coach's experience in your first session with him or her. Take the opportunity to ask about the practitioner's experience with your issue and how long he or she has been in practice.

Third, you need to determine your budget. Most licensed therapists and counselors will take insurance, but you need to know if they take your type of insurance. Coaches do not take insurance, but some types of coaching can be written off as an education or business expense. However, your budget should not get in the way of you considering the aforementioned factors. Spending on even the most reasonably priced counselor or coach will be a waste of money if he or she isn't the right person for you.

*For more info, contact Dr. Lisabeth Saunders Medlock, PhD, at Life By Design Coaching in downtown Columbia at 803-960-1844, or visit [LifeByDesignCoaching.org](http://LifeByDesignCoaching.org). See community resource guide page 31.*

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