

# 10 Ways Churches Can Partner With Mental Health Services

Here's a list of best practices describing how churches can make connections with local community mental health services.

## Finding Partners

1. **Identify who in your church works in the mental health field.** The reason for this is that you can ask them to make connections for you with local mental health organizations. Having a person who works at the intersection of faith and mental health (1 foot in the church and 1 foot in the system) will help you have someone who knows the resources and can make introductions for you to other potential partners.
2. **Identify local organizations such as your Community Mental Health Center.** In many counties, there are multiple such centers with at least one in each area of the county. Working at these centers will be psychiatrists, therapists, case managers and other professionals and services. Knowing where this center is will allow you to reach out to them to partner. In addition to the advice in #1, a way to learn which center is local to you is to contact your county's Office of Mental Health (or Behavioral Health) to find out what services are in your area.
3. **Explore whether there are any local faith-based organizations serving people with mental health struggles.** Many churches say that they "don't know who they can trust" when it comes to referring a congregant to a mental health professional. Due to this challenge, finding an organization/professional with a holistic vision of support will be invaluable both for referring needs (ex: employment, counseling, etc.) as well as receiving consultation and training. The only challenge here is that many Christian counseling organizations don't have strong ties with the Public Mental Health system and, therefore, won't be able to help you partner with serving many outside the church who are hurting.

## Starting the Conversation

4. **Ask them about them.** Most organizations want to tell you about their different resources. By starting the conversation with what you want to learn about them (rather than what you want to say about your church), you are more likely to get a responsive willingness to sit down and meet.
5. **Offer to help with their needs.** Instead of focusing on your agenda as a church, find out from the organization how your church might be helpful to them or people they serve.

6. **Be Bilingual.** Speak in language that will make sense to them as unchurched human service professionals. For example, use words and phrases like “socialization” rather than “fellowship”, “service” rather than “ministry”, “spirituality” rather than “religion.” The reason to do this is that it helps you meet them where they are and see how what you offer isn’t just about your mission (ex: making disciples, evangelism, etc.) but their mission as well (ex: community integration, integrated health, etc.). This use of culture-informed language is modeled by Paul in Acts 17.

### **Collaborate**

7. **Offer to meet with participants interested in exploring a faith community.** Most mental health professionals see the value in participants getting connected to a faith community but don’t know what faith communities exist in the area. By offering your help in speaking with participants who are already interested in a faith community, you are making the professional’s job easier while also helping people who may be interested in exploring your church.
8. **Offer to provide transportation for people – whether it be to your church gatherings or other locations.** A number of people receiving services are in need of transportation. This creates an obstacle to organizations because they often can’t bill for transportation. By your congregants offering to help with transportation you’re meeting their need and potentially helping someone explore your church and the gospel as well.
9. **Reach out for consultation and/or support when someone in your church is struggling.** For example, I have seen pastors and parishioners find it very helpful to call their county’s mobile crisis team when someone in their church is experiencing a crisis such as having thoughts of suicide.
10. **Request training for your church.** There are certain skills like suicide intervention (i.e. suicide first aid) that congregants should have in order to minister effectively to one another within a church. These skills and others may be offered by local organizations. Trainings could include “Mental Health First Aid”, “Youth Mental Health First Aid”, “QPR – Question, Persuade, Refer” and ASIST (Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training). It is important that churches be trained in such matters since research shows that clergy and congregations are among the first places people go to for support when they’re in a mental health crisis.

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