How-To Guide: Calling Therapists/Psychiatrists

When you call a therapist or psychiatrist in a private practice setting, you will likely reach voicemail. Be prepared to leave a voicemail message with good times to call you back.

- Introduce yourself. Say your name and tell them if you are an undergraduate or graduate student at Stanford.
- If you received their name from someone, tell them who referred you (e.g. the name of your CAPS therapist, friend, RD, etc.).
- Tell them what your insurance is (e.g. Cardinal Care, Anthem Blue Cross, United, etc.) and ask if they are currently accepting new clients with your insurance plan.
- Tell them your phone number (say it twice, slowly and clearly) and give them information on what times are best to contact you directly. Let them know it is okay for them to leave a voicemail on your phone. Make sure that your phone has voicemail set up and the voicemail box is not full. Some (not all) therapists are willing to arrange appointments by email. If you would like to do this, tell them your email and tell them it’s okay to email you to set up an appointment.

You can call and leave messages for several providers in one sitting (rather than calling just one clinician). You may find it helpful to spend a couple of minutes on the phone with several clinicians to get a sense of who you feel a connection with. You may also choose to meet with a couple of different clinicians, then decide who you feel most comfortable with. It is okay to talk with or meet with a couple of different people, then make a decision about whom you would like to continue with. You are welcome to tell the providers you are doing this. For example, “I am talking with a couple of therapists to get a feel for who might be the best fit for me. I’d like to talk with you for a couple of minutes about how we might work together. If this feels like the best fit, could I call you back to schedule an appointment?”

If you talk with or meet with a couple of therapists, you may find it helpful to ask about the following when you are trying to get a sense of who might be a good fit:

- Tell them a little about how you are feeling and what you are struggling with. Ask how they might help someone with your concerns. What experience do they have helping someone with the types of problems you are experiencing?
- Could they describe their approach to treatment?
- What are their specialties?
- What hours are they available to see you?