

GUIDE 1

How to Identify Your Niche

The first step towards creating a successful therapy practice is to identify your niche. Many therapists neglect this step. They mistakenly believe that they should keep their therapy practice open to any client who is willing to walk through the door.

Niche (adj): a specific problem that you help solve for a specific group of people.

However, when you find the right niche, your practice will truly thrive. This guide will help you understand why you need to name your niche. More importantly, it will help you to figure out the niche that is right for you.

What is a niche in therapy?

A niche is a specific problem that you help solve for a specific group of people. In therapy, your niche will include several parts:

- The problem; for example, you can specialize in trauma, anxiety, or OCD

- The clients; this may be teens, families with toddlers, or corporate executives
- The solution; this is your therapeutic approach – somatic, CBT, or psychoanalytic

Therefore, one example of a specific niche in therapy is a therapist who uses group therapy to assist teens who have OCD.

Wait. Shouldn't I accept all clients?

At this point, you may feel a bit skeptical. You might be thinking, “I want to help everyone that I can.” Additionally, you might think that narrowing the focus of your client base will prevent you from getting enough clients to fill your practice.

Although it may feel counterintuitive, it is actually true that focusing on a very specific niche in therapy will help you to grow your practice. You won't get fewer clients in the door. Instead, you will get more clients, and they will be the right clients for you.

Here's the problem: when you try to appeal to everyone, you don't connect with anyone.

As a client, it is very difficult to choose the right therapist. There are many different people out there to choose from, and often you're choosing based on a website or an initial phone call.

The process is daunting. However, it gets a lot easier when you see that a therapist has specific experience working with someone like you.

Working with the niche example above, let's imagine that you are a teenager living with OCD. When you seek out a therapist, you want to find someone who not only has experience working with teens, but who also knows how to help you deal with OCD symptoms.

If you've already tried individual therapy to no avail, you might specifically look for a therapist who does group work. Therefore, you are much more likely to call a therapist advertising in that niche than to contact someone out of the blue who offers "general therapy." After all, who knows if that random generalist can help you?

Now that you've looked at it from the client's perspective, you can see why it really helps to define your niche.

Here are some additional benefits to claiming your niche as a therapist:

- You will get to focus on the work that you enjoy. Therefore, you will do your best work.
- You will get more practice in a very specific area of therapy, leading you towards becoming an expert in that area.
- People will think of you with regard to that niche. This increases successful referrals.
- You can target your website marketing, so people can easily find you in an online search.

In other words, working in a niche area will improve your skills as a therapist. This will grow your business. At the same time, focusing on niche will give you the opportunity to implement targeted marketing.

Marketing to a specific group of people produces better, faster results than more generalized marketing can provide. Therefore, you will also attract new clients in your niche at the same time that you grow your experience in this area.

How to find your niche

The following exercises are designed to help you identify your niche as a therapist. As you go through these exercises, keep in mind that they are based on both your experience and your aspirations.

Brainstorming

The first exercise is simply to come up with a list of clients that you like or might want to try working with. Think about age, problem type, therapeutic approach, life stage, and gender. Jot short descriptions of each of these things.

In terms of experience, consider past and present clients that you've really enjoyed working with. Think about the experiences that have been most successful. Make a note of those clients that you were always excited to see come through the door.

Don't worry if you aren't working as a therapist, yet. For example, you might still be in school. You can still think about the dyads that you have done, past experiences that you have had, and education topics that have excited you thus far. All of that experience will help guide you to find your niche.

However, you may discover that your niche is something that you don't yet have a lot of experience with. That's the aspirational part. Dream big. Think about all of the potential clients, problems and solutions that excite you as a therapist. Add these to the list.

Sorting Things Out

The next exercise is to go through the list and find commonalities. As you do this, you can sort all of those “ideal situations” into the important niche categories of the problem, the client, and the solution. Divide a paper into those three parts, then sort the brainstorm list accordingly.

For example, let’s say that you immediately thought about a client named Marcia that you really like. She is a single mother of three young children. She came to you because of panic attacks, but you eventually started working on her underlying trauma issues.

She has responded well to somatic interventions. Your brainstorming list might just say “Marcia”. However, in this exercise, you are able to add the following information to each category:

- Problem: Panic attacks secondary to trauma
- Client: Middle-aged single mother
- Solution: Somatic therapy

Do this for each item on your list. In some cases, you may be just working with an idea, not an actual client. For example, let’s say that you really loved learning about Rapid Resolution Therapy in school. You can add this under “solutions” in your list, because it’s a therapy you want to focus on.

You might also be able to use information about the therapy itself to help identify the problem. Rapid Resolution Treatment is often used for trauma. Furthermore, you might be able to guess as to the client. This type of therapy is for people seeking short-term solutions that don't involve a lot of talk therapy. What type of client image does this bring to mind?

Narrowing Down the Niche

Once you have a list of problems, clients and solutions that interest you, then you are ready to narrow it down. You want to focus on just one choice from each category. What is the problem that most interests you at this time? Who is the ideal client? What solution can you best offer to them? This is your niche. Frame it as a single sentence. For example:

- I want to help first-time mothers struggling with post-partum depression using systems-based family therapy.
- I want to work with children ages 4-13 who are in the foster care system and struggling with PTSD. I will use play therapy as my primary technique.
- I love working with gay male executives who thrive in their career but have problems in personal relationships, using group therapy to help them open up.

Developing a Niche-Based Practice

Now that you know exactly who you want to work with, you are ready to grow your practice. Here are some steps to take:

- Focus on the clients who already meet the criteria. Over time, you may let other clients go.
- Get any additional training required to allow you to work in your desired niche. For example, you may want to get certified in EMDR.
- Adapt your website and other marketing materials to emphasize your niche. Let people know what you do well and who you want to work with.
- Research, write articles, and give talks to develop this niche expertise.
- Use consultations to explain your niche and confirm that potential clients fit this niche.

Don't worry. You aren't locked into the niche that you choose. Over time, you might change your niche entirely. Alternatively, you may focus on a subcategory of that niche or expand to offer an additional service within that niche.

There is always room to grow. Nevertheless, starting with a strong specialized niche will get your practice going in the right direction.

NEXT:

Take all those ideas that are probably swirling around in your head and get started on the Niche workbook.

I recommend using our Google Doc workbook. That way, it's easy to share, edit, and get feedback on. Here's how to use it:

1. Open the doc here - <http://bit.ly/2Okh44C>
2. Click on the "File" menu and select "Make a Copy."

WORKBOOK 1

Finding a niche for your therapist website

It is important to define your niche as a therapist. It helps you to find the clients that you'll be most excited and capable of helping. It helps the clients who need you most to find you so that you can help. So, how do you go about defining your niche?

This worksheet will help you figure out the perfect niche for you. Of course, you can always change your mind. The more information that you get, the better you will be able to define your area of expertise. But this worksheet can put you well on your way to establishing the niche that is right for you at the current time.

Finding your niche isn't easy. You should definitely trust your gut and answer these questions intuitively. However, don't feel like you have to rush the process. It might take a few days or even a few weeks of sitting with the questions to finally feel ready to answer them fully.

One great approach is to quickly answer the questions below, then set them aside, returning to them at a later date to see if the answers still feel right.

Mining your interests

1. What are your favorite problems to solve in therapy? (Examples include OCD symptoms, trauma, co-parenting after divorce, etc.) Be as specific as possible.

2. Who is your favorite client? Describe them in specific detail including age, gender, and personality type.

3. What traits are common among all of the clients that you like? (Positive attitude, resilience, a little guarded ... what seems similar in the people you've enjoyed working with?)

4. What type of therapy do you practice (or want to practice)? (Examples include psychoanalysis, CBT, somatic therapy, etc.)

5. What specific certifications or advanced training do you have or wish to get? Most likely, this is a specific area of expertise that relates to the type of therapy you practice. For example, EMDR is a specific type of trauma treatment.

6. Think about all of the trainings you have done, books you have read, and clients that you have met. What general topics excite you most. This might include specific diagnoses, unusual client problems or unique types of treatment. What really made you light up and want to know more?

7. If you could help anyone in the world, who would that person be? Describe their traits, the problems they have, and the solutions you would offer.

Narrowing it down

Now you have a lot of information. We are ready to break it down into something that you can use to clearly and succinctly define your niche. Using the answers to the questions above, briefly describe the following three things:

1. Who is your number one ideal client? (Age, gender, orientation, marital status, spiritual background ... include as many details as possible.)

2. What is the problem you most want to treat? (Are you excited about being able to help premarital couples who have concerns about marriage? Do you thrive on helping people who have debilitating anxiety? Name the problem.)

3. What is your favorite treatment option? (What style of therapy do you feel most comfortable with, experienced in, and confident in the value of?)

Defining your niche

Now it's time to write a 1-2 sentence description of your niche. Use the three answers from Part Two to clearly and concisely answer the question: "What do you do?"

For example:

- I work with teens (that's the client) who have behavioral problems secondary to PTSD (that's the problem) using adolescent group therapy (the treatment type).

Other examples:

- I work with married couples who are considering divorce after infidelity, using The Gottman Institute techniques.
- I help immigrant college students who are struggling in school using CBT to build skills.
- I work with young adults struggling with drug addiction using a harm reduction approach.
- I help men about to retire who are dealing with depression using traditional talk therapy.

So, think about it. You're at a party. Someone asks, "what do you do?" Use the information from Part One of the worksheet, distilled down in Part Two, to answer the question by defining the client, the problem, and the treatment solution. This is your niche.

"WHAT DO YOU SAY?"

Congrats

You finished this workbook

Now that you've identified your niche, take a few days to let it sit. Then, look back over your answers and see if they still feel right to you.

If you get stuck with anything, please feel free to reach. I'm always here to help.

Kindest Regards,
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