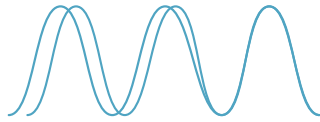


MENTAL HEALTH MATCH

# Four Ingredients of a Perfect Therapist Photo





MENTAL HEALTH MATCH

## **Break Through the Noise**

You are an expert in many things, but digital marketing might not be one of them.

That is why Mental Health Match has developed this guide, which is part of a series that can help you better connect to prospective clients.

Mental Health Match's unique matching system shows your information first when prospective clients are well-matched to your practice. Plus, our profile prompts allow you to authentically express yourself to the clients you want to work with. The result is more clients who feel like a fit, and more clients who come back session after session.

Leave the advertising to us and keep your focus on your clients. Try Mental Health Match for free for 3 months with referral code PHOTOS.

[Learn more about Mental Health Match](#) and start a free trial today.

**Mental Health Match** has studied the way clients search for therapists online, and learned the most important part of your therapist profile is your photo. This short guide will help you create a headshot photo that resonates with prospective clients and causes them to stop scrolling and learn more about you.

Your headshot is the first thing a prospective client looks at. **Your photo is what creates an initial connection with prospective clients and stands out far more than any text you can write.**

In a fraction of a second, a potential client evaluates your photo - often not even consciously. Instead, prospective clients look at your photo and feel a gut reaction about if:

- You look friendly and inviting.
- Your presentation inspires confidence.
- They feel like they might relate to you.

If your photo does not inspire both an emotional connection and feeling of professional confidence, the prospective client will move on. To create a photo that can help you reach new clients, consider these four aspects:

**Lighting:** Your face should be highlighted without shadows or glare.

**Eye Contact:** Your eyes should be clearly visible, ideally with a bit of a sparkle.

**Background:** The right background can enhance a feeling of trust and connection, but a distracting background can pull attention away from what matters.

**Presentation:** How you sit, your clothing, and your facial expressions all determine if the prospective client feels confidence and a sense of connection.

The rest of this guide will provide more details about each of these aspects, as well as examples of what to do and what not to do. It ends with an exercise to help you evaluate your current photo and determine if it is time for a new one.



Be careful when using the same photo for social media as your professional presentation. They have two very different purposes and audiences. This guide will help you determine if that fun social media photo is a right fit for your professional headshot.

# LIGHTING

In your photo, your face should be clearly lit without harsh light or glare -- especially if you wear glasses. You want your face to pop and the viewer to be naturally drawn into your face and eyes.

Natural lighting from the sun is best because it feels soft, bright, and warm. Avoid direct sunlight because it creates shadows. Instead, look for softer light on an overcast day, or during dawn and dusk when the sun is lower in the sky.

If you are in a studio, try wearing darker clothes to make your face really stand out.

## What Works:



The natural lighting works because their face is well lit without the lighting being harsh. The soft light combines with their soft smile to give the impression they are a soft, gentle person to work with.



The combination of the studio lighting and dark jacket makes their face pop in the picture. There are no busy colors or patterns in the background to distract the viewer.

## What Could Be Better:



The shadows across their face are distracting and make it hard to see their eyes. The bright glare on their forehead also draws the viewer away from their eyes.

## EYE CONTACT

In the therapy room, clear eye contact helps your clients feel listened to, understood, and seen. The same is true in your online profile. A photo with clear eye contact creates a personal and emotional connection with prospective clients, building a sense of trust in you as a clinician.

To create strong eye contact in your photo, make sure you are looking directly at the camera. Pretend there is a client on the other end of the camera lens. Look at the camera as you would a client in the room with you.

If you have longer hair, make sure it is away from your eyes. If you wear makeup, try using subtle colors around your eyes that draw the viewer in. If you wear glasses, make sure there is no glare preventing people from seeing your eyes.

### What Works:



This person's eyes feel like they are seeing you through the screen. They are centered in the photo, and the darker shirt and background help make their eyes pop in the photo.



This person's eyes are wide open and looking right at you. They've even used a subtle blue makeup around their eyes to further accent their eyes and draw the viewer in. While there is strong eye contact, the busy background could potentially distract the viewer.

## What Could Be Better:



While the feeling of the photo is warm, this person is looking away from the camera and the photo itself is dark. It is a missed opportunity to create an emotional connection with the viewer.



While this person is looking directly at the camera, the glare on their glasses interrupts the eye contact. The bright color of the glasses frames also distracts the viewer.

## BACKGROUND

The background of your photo can either distract the viewer and make them feel overwhelmed, or it can emphasize you and the work you do.

Backgrounds that often work well for therapists and counselors include:

- Natural areas like trees and hedges
- Outdoor areas that are open and bright
- Office environments that feel professional and reflect your unique personality
- Solid single-color surfaces like walls, brick, wood, or siding

Backgrounds that you should avoid:

- Cluttered indoor areas
- Personal spaces like a living room or bedroom
- Windows that reflect glare
- Studio backgrounds with a lot of reflection
- Candid shots from bars, restaurants, or in your car

When considering your background, also consider how zoomed in you want your photo to be. You want your face to be the primary focus of the photo. Zoom in enough to see your eyes and a bit of your surroundings, but do not zoom in so much that the entire photo is just your face.

## What Works:



The background is bright, green, and calming - without distracting the viewer from the therapist and their eye contact.



The background is a solid, neutral color. It brightens up the photo while allowing the viewer to stay focused on the therapist and their eye contact.

## What Could Be Better:



This therapist's eye contact is great, but the viewer gets immediately distracted by the people in the background.



This photo is too zoomed in and cropped too close to the person's face. The viewer misses out on added context that can be provided with body language, dress, and background. As such, this photo does not give the prospective client an idea of who this therapist is or how they might show up in the therapy room.

# PRESENTATION

Your presentation is created by your facial expression, clothes, and your pose. These items can either reinforce or hinder the sense of connection prospective clients feel when they see you.

More than any other element of your photo, your presentation should reinforce your niche by appealing to the specific types of clients you work with.

Here are some examples of how you can align your presentation and your niche:

- If you work mostly with stressed professionals, you may want to dress more formally with minimal jewelry, and have a slightly serious facial expression.
- If you work with adolescents or college students, you may choose more casual dress with fun accessories and a big smile.
- If you work with people who have experienced trauma, you may choose clothes that are simple and calming, and have a facial expression that feels soft, warm, and inviting.

## What Works:



This therapist works with teens and their presentation works well for that population. The therapist's casual cloths and necklace feel relatable, and their slightly forward stance feels like they are leaning in to listen to you.



This therapist works primarily with men in high-pressure jobs. The sharp, stylish, and formal outfit is relatable to other business professionals and creates a sense of a shared foundation. Unfortunately, the shadow on the right side gets in the way of clear eye contact.



## What Could Be Better:



The reclining posture, bold eye makeup, and serious facial expression make this photo feel more like a model shot than a professional therapist. The person appears glamorous, but not professional or welcoming.



The combination of crossed arms and a gaze that looks downward into the camera makes this therapist come across as judgmental, instead of empathetic and understanding.

### Put this all to use

It can be hard to evaluate your own photo as you get overly focused on minor details and how you look rather than what you convey. The best way to figure out if a photo works for a professional headshot is to sit down with a friend.

You and your friend should discuss the four elements in this guide:

- Lighting: can you clearly see your face and eyes? Are there distracting shadows or glare?
- Eye contact: can the viewer see into your eyes? What do your eyes convey?
- Background: when you first look at the photo, do you look at your face and eyes, or do you get pulled in a different direction?
- Presentation: are your appearance, posture, and facial expression relatable to the populations you work with?

### Hiring a photographer

You do not need a professional photographer to take quality photos. A friend or family member can use this guide to help you stage a great photo. However, you may choose to hire a professional photographer if it is difficult to find a location with good lighting, or if you want someone skilled at removing wrinkles and blemishes from the final photo.