

Questions to Ask Before Choosing an Outpatient Mental Health or Addiction Program

A family preparation worksheet from Brave Path Recovery. This resource is educational and is not a substitute for emergency care, medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment.

Immediate safety first: call 911 for immediate danger. Call or text 988 for emotional crisis or suicide-related distress. In Massachusetts, call or text the Behavioral Health Help Line at 833-773-2445 for 24/7 connection to mental health and substance-use services.

1. Safety and level of care

Is there any immediate danger, suicidal thinking, overdose risk, withdrawal risk, violence, or inability to stay safe?	Notes / answers
Would the program recommend emergency care, medical detox, mobile crisis, residential care, full-time day treatment, part-time day treatment, or weekly therapy first?	Notes / answers
How does the team decide whether outpatient care is clinically appropriate right now?	Notes / answers

2. Clinical fit

Can the program address mental health, substance use, and co-occurring concerns together?	Notes / answers
What types of clinicians are involved in assessment, treatment planning, groups, and family communication?	Notes / answers
How are trauma, grief, anxiety, depression, relapse risk, and medication needs coordinated?	Notes / answers

3. Program structure

What does a typical week look like, including group therapy, individual therapy, family support, and case-management time?	Notes / answers
How many days or hours are recommended, and what would cause that plan to change?	Notes / answers

How does the program support people balancing work, school, parenting, transportation, or privacy concerns?	Notes / answers
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4. Family involvement and communication

How can family members share concerns before admission or during care?	Notes / answers
What can the program discuss with family, and what requires written consent?	Notes / answers
Does the team help families build a plan for warning signs, boundaries, crisis steps, and follow-up support?	Notes / answers

5. Costs, insurance, and logistics

Is the program in network, out of network, or self-pay? What is verified before the first appointment?	Notes / answers
What documents should be prepared: insurance card, medication list, allergies, prior treatment history, and emergency contacts?	Notes / answers
What happens if the program is not the right fit or a higher level of care is needed?	Notes / answers

6. Aftercare and continuity

How is progress reviewed during the program?	Notes / answers
What happens after discharge or step-down: therapy, medication support, peer recovery, family work, or alumni resources?	Notes / answers
Who should the family call if symptoms or substance use begin escalating again?	Notes / answers

Quick call preparation page

Before calling a crisis line, clinician, or outpatient program, write down the facts that will help the conversation move quickly and safely.

Current concern	What changed? When did it start? What feels unsafe or unmanageable?
Substance use	Recent substances, amount, frequency, last use, overdose history, withdrawal concerns.
Mental health symptoms	Mood, anxiety, sleep, eating, hallucinations, panic, self-harm thoughts, trauma triggers.
Medical facts	Medications, allergies, diagnoses, pregnancy, recent hospital or ER visits.
Supports	Trusted contacts, transportation, safe place to stay, current providers.
Insurance/logistics	Insurance card, location, work or school schedule, privacy concerns.

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Sources reviewed: Mass.gov Roadmap for Behavioral Health Reform, Behavioral Health Help Line, BSAS dashboard, 2024 opioid-involved overdose report, Massachusetts Youth Health Survey, and 988 Lifeline. Review date: May 20, 2026.