



# JENNIFER PRENDERGRAST

LICENSED MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR

"WHEN [CLIENTS] COME TO ME, MY GOAL IS THAT THEY LEAVE THINKING AND FEELING UNDERSTOOD — THAT IS MY PURPOSE AND MY PASSION."

Jennifer meets with clients ranging from four to over the age of forty-five. She deals with a range of mental health diagnoses, but focuses on PTSD and trauma-work with her clients.

## WHAT IS YOUR UNIQUE GENIUS?

"My unique genius is being observant and in tune with my clients. Being sensitive to people's emotions is my superpower."

## HOW DID YOU BECOME INTERESTED IN THIS CAREER?

"I was born knowing I wanted to help people and do something in this career in terms of holding space for people to process hard things. I always had the knowing, but it was more of pairing it with a specific degree program that I needed to look for."

## IN WHAT WAYS IS YOUR CAREER A PERFECT FIT FOR YOU?

"I don't feel like I can imagine doing something else. I feel like I truly do forget that I'm working because it is so aligned with me and it is my passion."

**"When I'm sitting with someone living out my purpose, it's more of an honor to me than anything."**

## WHAT DOES A DAY IN THE LIFE LOOK LIKE?

"I never have the same day. I come in, set up the office, check emails, make phone calls. I have to be ready for the unexpected because of the role that [I] play in clients' lives. [I] have to be ready for the unpredictable and expect the unexpected."

Sessions are [all] different. There's different issues that come up in different conversations, and then my next session is completely different. My [child] clients come in after school and I get to do my favorite part — sit on the ground with them and play and hear about what's going on in their lives."

## WHAT SKILLS DOES IT TAKE TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN YOUR JOB?

"Being empathetic is really important, obviously. But, you do have to be really strong to be a therapist. You have to be really brave and resilient because people come in and share secrets that they have never told anyone before. You can't make that moment about you."

Another skill that people may not consider is really being assertive. People will try to tell you what you're doing isn't working. When parents come into session and you see them using invalidating words, it is your job to step in. You can't be scared to do that because no one else is going to do it."

## WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU KNEW WHEN YOU WERE YOUNGER?

"I wish I knew that being sensitive wasn't a bad thing. I was told in different ways throughout my life that being sensitive was a bad thing and it was a flaw. I identified it that way and I felt like I needed to change this thing about me. I changed that perception and took something that I thought was a flaw and made it into a force. That is what made me so passionate about my purpose in my career, and that is how I connect so well with clients."

**"I made a flaw into a force – being sensitive is not a bad thing. It is not a flaw."**

## WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF ON YOUR JOURNEY?

"I am most proud of my commitment to my dream. I knew what I wanted to do, and I did not give myself another option because there was no other option. I set out to go to college, go right into my masters, open my own practice and eventually expand."

## WHAT IS THE COOLEST PART OF YOUR JOB? WHAT IS THE MOST CHALLENGING PART OF YOUR JOB?

"I think one of the coolest things is that my clients don't know anything about me. Some of my younger kids [ask], 'do you live here?' I think it's cool because it's not about you when you're a therapist — it's about the client. It's cool that they have someone that isn't going to unload on them back."

[The most challenging part is] we can't tell our clients what we think they should do. We have to provide the space and really help them get there on their own."

## WHAT IS THE ONE THING THAT PEOPLE DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOUR FIELD/JOB?

"People assume that it doesn't really take a lot to be a therapist. I may be wrong on that, but some people think [if they are] good at giving advice, [they] could be a therapist. It's much more than giving advice. I think it's up there with the toughest job in the world. It's just as valuable as a surgeon with an open body on a table — this is someone's brain and body and soul that they are opening up and revealing to you."

## WHAT WAS A DEFINING MOMENT IN YOUR LIFE?

"The most defining moment in my life was when I went to college. I made some poor choices and I felt this really deep disappointment in myself. I knew that I never wanted to feel that way again. I used that feeling as motivation to succeed."