Help! I don’t know what I want!

If you’re looking for counseling internship and don’t know where to start, I have a tip for you.

**Start with what you don’t want.**

I know it’s weird. But hear me out. When we first get into this gig, sometimes we get the opposite of tunnel vision. The possibilities of our professional life seem expansive. We’ve just had our first taste of clinical work in our practica and we are absolutely stunned that we get to make a living doing this amazing thing called therapy.

**The pain of choosing**

And then we have to pick an internship site. We have to choose. We must (temporarily) close our doors against dozens of other options that also look really, really good.

Sometimes people feel so overwhelmed by the decision, I tell them to start at the other end of the question. Stop focusing on what you do want, and start thinking about what you don’t want.

Make a list of the kinds of clinical work that you don’t want to do. Include any population of client, diagnosis, or work setting that doesn’t appeal to you. Now you have a starting point. You know what you *don’t* want.

**Want some extra credit?**

Next to each “do not want” item, jot a note about why you don’t want to serve this group or in this setting. What do your notes reveal? Do you worry that you don’t have enough training to help a certain kind of client? Does a certain population touch on some of your own history? Maybe the demands of a certain setting or schedule feel like too much right now.

Sometimes we can learn a lot from being challenged in our work—so in the end, you may not want to rule everything out on your list. But a simple “do not want” list can be a good starting point for your search.

PS: Remember, you get more than just your internship to explore all the options. So you don’t have to see every kind of client in every setting right away. Your clinical practice will evolve as you do, and you will likely work in many different settings with many different kinds of people over the course of your career.