JP MARKETING

WORKBOOK + ASSETS

Google Ads Exact-Match Search Campaign Starter Kit

Settings, keywords, ads, and assets for counselors & therapists

Free resource from JP Marketing · jpmarketing.co · Updated November 2026

What this kit is

This is a done-for-you starter setup for a **Google Ads Search campaign** for counseling practices, using **exact match keywords only.**

Exact match means you pick the exact searches you want. You don't let Google wander off and spend your money on random stuff. It's the safest way to start.

> **Truth about "exact" match (2026):** Exact match isn't 100% exact anymore. Google also shows your ad for "close variants" with the same meaning (like misspellings, plurals, or reworded searches). That's why you still need **negative keywords** and a **weekly search terms check**. Also, Google's newer **AI Max** setting makes keywords act more like broad match. If you want true exact-match control, keep AI Max (and its search term matching) turned off. One more thing: exact match keywords **can't** show ads *inside* Google's AI Overviews. They can still show above and below them.

Words to know

Word	What it means
Exact match	Your ad shows for that search or very close versions of it. Written with [brackets].
Negative keyword	A word that STOPS your ad from showing, like 'jobs' or 'free.'
CPC	Cost per click: what you pay when someone clicks your ad.
CTR	Click-through rate: out of 100 people who see the ad, how many click.
Conversion	A good action, like a call or a booked appointment.
Ad group	A group of keywords and ads about one service.
Assets	Extras on your ad like extra links, phone number, and photos.
Search terms report	A list of the real searches that made your ad show.

Step 1: Campaign settings (do these exactly)

Setting	Pick this	Why
Campaign goal	Leads (or create without a goal)	Keeps setup simple
Campaign type	Search	Text ads on Google search only
Networks	UNCHECK Search Partners and Display	Keeps your money on Google search
AI Max	OFF	Keeps exact match acting like exact match
Broad match setting	OFF	Same reason
Locations	Your real service area (cities or a radius)	No wasted clicks
Location option	Presence: people IN or regularly in your area	Not 'interest in' your area
Language	English (add Spanish if you serve Spanish speakers and have Spanish ads)	
Bidding (start)	Maximize clicks with a max CPC limit, OR Manual CPC	Learn real costs first
Bidding (after ~30 conversions)	Maximize conversions or Target CPA	Let Google optimize with real data
Ad schedule	When someone can answer the phone	Calls you miss are wasted money
Auto-apply recommendations	Turn them OFF (Recommendations > Auto-apply)	Stops Google from adding broad keywords

Tip: Google Ads changes its menus often. If you can't find a setting, search the Google Ads Help Center for its name.

Step 2: Campaign structure

Keep it simple: **one campaign, a few tight ad groups.** Each ad group = one service.

Ad group	Number of keywords
Anxiety Therapy	5
Couples Counseling	5
General Therapist	5
Teen & Child	4
Online Therapy	4

Step 3: Exact match keywords

Square brackets = exact match. Change the city names to yours.

Ad group: Anxiety Therapy

```
[anxiety therapist plano]
[anxiety therapy plano tx]
[anxiety counseling plano]
[anxiety counselor near plano]
[therapist for anxiety plano]
```

Ad group: Couples Counseling

```
[couples counseling plano]
[marriage counseling plano tx]
[couples therapist plano]
[marriage counselor frisco]
[gottman therapist plano]
```

Ad group: General Therapist

```
[therapist plano tx]
[counselor plano tx]
[counseling plano]
[therapist near plano]
[therapy plano tx]
```

Ad group: Teen & Child

```
[teen therapist plano]
[child therapist plano]
[counselor for teens plano]
[play therapy plano]
```

Ad group: Online Therapy

```
[online therapist texas]
[online counseling texas]
[virtual therapist texas]
[telehealth therapy texas]
```

> **Tip:** Look up real search numbers and costs in Google Keyword Planner (free inside Google Ads). Remove keywords with zero searches. Add the versions people actually type.

Step 4: Negative keywords

Add these to a **shared negative keyword list** (Tools > Shared library > Negative keyword lists) and apply it to the campaign. Change any that don't fit your business.

```
jobs, hiring, salary, degree, license requirements, ceu, supervision,
internship, free, hotline, crisis, emergency, psychiatrist (if you don't
prescribe), medication, rehab, detox, inpatient, drug, alcohol (unless
certified), reddit, quotes, worksheet, pdf, book, app, betterhelp,
talkspace, physical therapist, massage, occupational therapy
```

Step 5: Your responsive search ad

Make **1 to 2 responsive search ads per ad group**. Google mixes and matches your headlines and descriptions.

Headlines (use 10 to 15 per ad):

#	Headline (30 characters max)	Chars
1	Therapists in Plano, TX	23
2	Anxiety Therapy That Helps	26
3	Couples Counseling in Plano	27
4	Free 15-Min Consult Call	24
5	Evening Appointments Open	25
6	In-Person or Online	19
7	Licensed, Caring Therapists	27
8	Openings This Week	18
9	Teen & Adult Counseling	23
10	Online Therapy in Texas	23
11	Gottman-Trained Therapists	26
12	Insurance & Private Pay	23
13	A Calm, Judgment-Free Space	27
14	Book Your First Session	23
15	Talk to a Real Person Today	27

Descriptions (use 4 per ad):

#	Description (90 characters max)	Chars
1	Caring, licensed therapists in Plano. In-person or online across Texas. Book a free call.	89
2	Feel more like yourself again. Evening spots open this week. Free 15-minute consult.	84
3	Couples counseling for partners who feel stuck. Gottman-trained. Book online today.	83
4	Teen and adult counseling. We take several insurance plans and offer superbills.	80

Display path: yoursite.com / anxiety / plano

> **Tip:** Pin your best headline (like the service + city one) to position 1 if you want it to always show. Don't pin too many, or Google can't test.

Step 6: Assets (they used to be called extensions)

Sitelinks:

Sitelink text	Description line
Free Consult Call	15 minutes, no pressure
Meet Our Therapists	Find your fit
Fees & Insurance	Clear pricing
Online Therapy	Anywhere in Texas
Couples Counseling	Gottman & EFT
Teen Counseling	Ages 13-18

Callouts: Licensed Therapists, Evening Hours, Telehealth Available, Free Consult, Superbills Provided, LGBTQ+ Affirming, Easy Online Booking, Openings This Week

Structured snippet: Services: Anxiety, Couples, Teens, Trauma/EMDR, Grief, Online Therapy

Call asset: Add your tracked phone number. Schedule it only for hours you answer.

Location asset: Link your Google Business Profile (if you have a storefront).

Image assets: Add 3 to 5 real photos (team, office, trucks, work).

Step 7: The landing page

Send each ad group to the **matching service page**, not your homepage. The page should have:

- [ ] Headline that matches the search (service + city)
- [ ] Phone number and button at the very top
- [ ] Reviews and trust facts right away
- [ ] Short form (name, phone, email, one question)
- [ ] Fast load on phones
- [ ] No menu clutter that distracts people (optional but helps)

Step 8: Conversion tracking (don't skip this!)

Track these as conversions:

- Consult booked
- Calls 60+ seconds
- Contact form
- Click to email

Connecting to GoHighLevel (or any CRM): Save the "gclid" (Google click ID) with each lead in a hidden form field. When a lead turns into a real client, upload it back to Google as an offline conversion. Then Google learns which clicks turn into money, not just which ones fill out forms.

Step 9: Budget

Start with $25 to $50 a day. Mental health clicks can be cheaper than other niches, but quality varies. Watch search terms every week.

Daily budget	What it's good for
Small	Test 1 to 2 top services
Medium	3 to 4 services, full service area
Bigger	All services + Spanish ads + more cities

Give it **at least 30 days** before you judge. Ads need time and data.

Step 10: Your weekly routine

When	What to do
Week 1 (every 2 days)	Check search terms. Add bad ones as negatives.
Weekly	Search terms report: add negatives, add good new exact keywords
Weekly	Listen to a few recorded calls (quality check)
Every 2 weeks	Pause keywords that spend a lot with no leads
Monthly	Test one new headline or description
Monthly	Compare cost per lead and cost per client

Rules for Counselors & Therapists

> **Policy:** Google has health and personal-ad rules. You can't build remarketing lists of people based on health topics. Addiction treatment ads need special certification (LegitScript). Don't write ads that say the reader has a condition ('Are you depressed?').

- HIPAA: never post or reply with client info.
- Many ethics codes (ACA, AAMFT, NASW) limit asking current clients for testimonials. Check yours.
- Don't promise outcomes ('cure your anxiety').
- Meta and Google won't allow ads that say the reader has a mental health condition.

- List your license type correctly everywhere.

Launch checklist

- ☐ Search only (no Display, no Search Partners)
- ☐ AI Max and broad match setting OFF
- ☐ Auto-apply recommendations OFF
- ☐ Location set to Presence
- ☐ Ad groups built with exact match keywords
- ☐ Shared negative list applied
- ☐ 2 ads per ad group with 10+ headlines
- ☐ Sitelinks, callouts, snippets, call asset added
- ☐ Each ad group sends people to the matching page
- ☐ Conversion tracking tested (do a test call and form)
- ☐ Ad schedule matches when you answer the phone
- ☐ Budget set

Sources for the 2026 exact match and AI Max facts: Google AI Max overview via Search Engine Journal and PPC Land on exact match and AI surfaces.

Your first 30 days, day by day

Days	What to do	What to look at
1 to 3	Launch. Make a test call and test form to check tracking.	Are ads showing? Is tracking working?
4 to 7	Check search terms every 2 days. Add negatives.	Junk searches, cost per click
8 to 14	Pause keywords with lots of spend and no leads.	Cost per lead by ad group
15 to 21	Move budget to the best ad group. Test 1 new headline.	Which ad group brings real clients
22 to 30	Listen to calls. Compare leads to real jobs/clients.	Cost per client, not just per lead

How to read the search terms report

1. In Google Ads, open your campaign, then Insights and reports > Search terms (menus can move).
2. Look at each search. Ask: would I want this person to call me?
3. If NO: check the box and click 'Add as negative keyword.'
4. If YES and it's not already a keyword: add it as a new [exact match] keyword.
5. Do this every 2 days in week 1, then once a week.

Want us to do this for you?

JP Marketing helps local businesses show up on Google, Google Maps, and AI search tools like ChatGPT. We build the websites, write the pages, run the ads, and set up the follow-up.

Book a free strategy call at jpmarketing.co. We'll look at your site and your Google profile, and show you the 3 fastest wins for your business.

Rules on Google, Meta, and AI tools change a lot. This guide was last updated November 2026. It is general marketing info, not legal advice.