



Guide to Mental Health Professionals

The mental health world has many types of professionals, each with different training and qualifications. Below is a list of common types of mental health providers. Keep in mind that regardless of the degree, good therapy usually results from finding a therapist you and/or your child can trust in and be honest with.

Psychologists

Psychologists are professionals who have earned a doctoral degree (Ph.D. or Psy.D.) after 4-6 years of graduate-level training and clinical work experience in human behavior and development, psychological testing and evaluation, and psychotherapy. Psychologists are licensed by the state in which they practice and approved providers in most insurance and managed-care plans.

Social Workers

Clinical Social Workers are professionals who have earned a master's degree in social work (M.S.W.) after 2-3 years of graduate training and clinical work experience. Clinical Social Workers are licensed by the state in which they practice (LCSW or similar credential - varies by state). Clinical social workers are approved providers in most insurance and managed-care plans.

Therapists and Counselors

Marriage and Family Therapists are professionals who have completed a master's degree (M.A. or M.S.) after 2-3 years of graduate training and clinical work experience. They often focus on helping couples or families, rather than individual treatment. Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFT) have completed a required amount of clinical hours and passed a state-administered examination to become licensed. LMFT's are licensed by the state in which they practice. The majority of managed care organizations and third-party payers reimburse services provided by MFTs.

Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC) & Licensed Mental Health Counselors (LMHC) are mental health professionals who have earned a master's degree (M.A. or M.S.) after 2-3 years of graduate training and clinical work experience. They often focus on helping individual clients, as well as family members. In addition, they have obtained a required amount of clinical experience and passed a state-administered licensing examination. LPC's and LMHC's are licensed by the state in which they practice. Some licensed counselors work independently; others receive health-care insurance reimbursements.

Psychiatrists

Psychiatrists are physicians (M.D. or D.O.) who have completed medical school, and have additional training in the evaluation and treatment of psychiatric disorders and emotional / behavioral problems. Psychiatrists are licensed by the state in which they practice. As medical doctors, psychiatrists can prescribe and monitor medications.

For more information on the training and credentialing of mental health professionals, see [Psychology Today: The Credentials](#) or the [Mayo Clinic's Types of Mental Health Providers](#).