

Information on Behavioral Health Professionals: Summary of Education and Training



Psychologist

Degree: PsyD, PhD

Training: Four to six years for a doctoral degree with graduate courses in human behavior, psychotherapy, and assessment, followed by one to two years of post-doctoral internship.

Typically provides psychotherapy, psychological assessment, research.

Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioner

Degree: PMHNP

Training: Two years of graduate school for a master's degree with courses in psychopharmacology, health promotion, and health assessment, followed by one to two years of supervised clinical work.

Typically provides medication management, evaluation, counseling.

Psychiatrist

Degree: MD, DO

Training: Four years of medical school with broad focus on biological functioning, followed by a one-year internship and at least three years of specialized training as a psychiatric resident, with a focus on preventing, diagnosing, and treating mental illness.

Typically provides medication management, evaluation, counseling.

Social Worker

Degree: LCSW (Licensed Clinical Social Worker)

Training: Two years of graduate school for a master's degree with courses in human behavior, counseling, and community resources, followed by two to three years of supervised clinical work.

Typically provides case management, counseling, outreach.

Counselor

Degree: LPC (Licensed Professional Counselor)

Training: Two years of graduate school for a master's degree with courses in counseling, human behavior, and human development, followed by up to four years of supervised clinical work.

Typically provides counseling.

Therapists within each profession may have specific specialties. Some have advanced skills working with different age groups (e.g., children, adolescents, older adults). Others address certain issues (e.g., drug or alcohol abuse, eating disorders, depression). All of these professionals must have a four-year bachelor's degree prior to undertaking graduate training. All must have a license, which tells you the therapist has passed an examination administered by the state.

Credentials tell you the therapist has completed academic and training requirements, but they do not tell you how good a therapist is or what kind of treatment they offer. It's important to interview potential behavioral health professionals and learn about their credentials, experience, and approach to treatment and then judge for yourself how comfortable you feel with the person.

Please note: The terms counseling and psychotherapy are often used interchangeably, but they can be dramatically different. Typically, counseling includes emotional support and help in problem-solving. This is usually a short-term type of treatment. Psychotherapy, on the other hand, will include emotional support and problem-solving, but is intended to treat and resolve deeper issues. Psychotherapy can be done in different modalities (e.g. cognitive-behavioral, gestalt, psychodynamic, interpersonal, etc.) and is typically a longer-term treatment. You should discuss your needs when you meet your provider.