

So You Want To Be A Therapist

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Introduction

Many students are interested in providing psychological therapy or otherwise interacting with people in a helping way. This brochure is intended to provide preliminary information about particular careers in the field of therapy. For additional information on salaries, the job market, extended job descriptions, etc., check the Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Social Worker, and Counselor books in the Career Resource Room, as well as in our Online Career Library.

For some students, the time to earn a degree is of utmost importance. One can earn a Master's degree in two to three years and become a non-licensed counselor or social worker. Licensure opens up more employment opportunities, and adds additional time to accrue 3000 hours of supervised experience. This is often unpaid so it may take three to four more years. Or, a doctorate degree typically takes four years of coursework, plus a year of internship, plus a year to write a dissertation. After earning a doctoral degree, 3000 years of supervised experience is required as part of the licensing process, and it is more likely that these hours are paid at this level. In real time it takes most people about six and a half years to become licensed as a counselor or social worker, and about seven and a half years to become licensed as a psychologist.

A more important factor to consider is which providers are being hired by insurance companies, HMOs, and "mental health carve out" services because increasingly, consumers want the cost of their counseling to be covered by their insurance. Only fairly or very wealthy consumers are willing to pay the high cost of mental health treatment out-of-pocket. If you are willing to limit your practice to those wealthy few, then you need not concern yourself with the question of insurance companies and HMOs. An aspiring therapist who wants a broader client base needs to pay attention to state and national legislation as well as market trends and business news sources to make the best prediction about where employment opportunities will lie.

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Careers Requiring an M.D.

Psychiatrist - A psychiatrist is an M.D. with special coursework and a residency in psychiatry. Total time in school and internship are longer than for a Ph.D., but the years in residence are better paid than those for a Ph.D. internship. A psychiatrist's work often focuses on medical as opposed to counseling interventions, although some psychiatrists do counseling. More commonly, counselors and psychologists provide the counseling while the psychiatrist works to regulate and optimize medications.

Prerequisite to Practice: Medical license

Licensure Requirements: M.D. with course work in psychiatry and a two year residency in psychiatry.

Psychoanalyst - A psychoanalyst is a psychiatrist with additional training at a psychoanalyst institute (Some institutes admit a few psychologists for training, but this is not the norm.) Psychoanalytic training is approximately five years beyond the M.D. and requires at least three years of coursework and at least two years of daily psychoanalytic sessions.

Prerequisite to Practice: Graduation from a psychoanalytic training institute.

Careers Requiring a Doctoral Degree

General Background Information - There are three doctoral level degrees that meet approval for licensing as a psychologist. The Ph.D. is the most accepted doctoral degree in the field of psychology. It is generally a research-based degree and adheres to the scientist/practitioner model first endorsed by the American Psychologist Association (APA). If you want the option of teaching or doing research in the field of psychology, this is the degree for you. The Psy.D. is a newer alternative and follows a practitioner/scientist model that focuses on practice over research. It is approved by the APA as an alternative to the Ph.D., though generally viewed as a "weaker" degree. The Ed.D. is the third doctoral degree. As about a third of counseling psychology programs are in schools of education (as opposed to psychology departments) the APA also approves an Ed.D. as an alternative to the Ph.D.

Clinical Psychology or Counseling Psychology? - The distinctions between these two areas of psychology have steadily faded, and graduates of the two types of programs are eligible for the same professional benefits, such as licensure, independent practice, and insurance reimbursement. Clinical psychology is offered by far more APA-accredited programs than counseling psychology: about 50% of all Ph.Ds and Psy.Ds awarded each year in psychology are in clinical psychology, while about 9% are in counseling psychology. Clinical psychology programs tend to train students in projective and intellectual assessment, while counseling psychology programs focus more on vocational and career assessment. Clinical psychologists tend to embrace cognitive-behavioral or psychodynamic orientations, while counseling

psychologists more frequently endorse a humanistic/Rogerian approach to psychotherapy. Finally, research shows that 15% more clinical psychologists are employed in full-time private practice than are counseling psychologists, whereas 10% more counseling psychologists are employed in college counseling centers than are clinical psychologists.

Clinical Psychologist - Clinical Psychologists devote themselves to the client and treatment of disturbed or maladaptive behavior and are trained to conduct research, teach, consult, or supervise. They function in a wide variety of settings including medical and psychiatric settings, juvenile correction centers, rehabilitation centers, university counseling departments, treatment centers, clinics, private practices, and schools.

Clinical psychology programs are very competitive. From a 1994 study of clinical programs the following admission data resulted: 1) The top five courses desired for entrance into the programs: statistics, experimental methods/research design, abnormal psychology, biopsychology, and learning/cognition, and at least one laboratory course. 2) About 60% of the programs recommend or require specific undergraduate courses; 15% require an undergraduate major in psychology; 10% apparently have no specific course requirements prior to admission; 42% of the programs emphasize practice over research (Psy.D programs); 30% are equal emphasis Ph.D programs; and the remainder are research-oriented PhD programs. 3) The mean acceptance rate for APA-accredited PhD programs was 12% in 2010. APA-accredited Psy.D. programs accepted the largest percentage at 45% on average, however less financial aid is typically available for these programs.

Prerequisite to Practice: License as a psychologist

Licensure Requirements: Doctoral degree in clinical psychology and 3000 hours experience.

Counseling Psychologist - Historically, counseling psychologists have worked either in private practice or college or community counseling centers. They tend to work with normal to mildly disturbed individuals with situational or developmental problems. Counseling psychologists tend toward an interpersonal, "mental health" perspective, with a focus on diagnosis and assessment but also career development, family systems, and community mental health. Recently, however, counseling psychologists have also been found working with more disturbed clients in clinical settings. (No comparable admissions studies have been reported for counseling psychology.)

Note: There is currently talk in APA of merging counseling and clinical psychology, but there has been no definite decision one way or another at this point.

Prerequisite to Practice: License as a psychologist

Licensure Requirements: Doctoral degree in counseling psychology and 3000 hours experience.

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Industrial/Organizational Psychologist - An I-O psychologist studies human behavior in organizations, and applies research that improves the well-being of performance of people and the organizations that employ them. Their focus is often on motivation, leadership or management skills, organizational structure, implementing work teams, and facilitating organizational change. They work in government, industry and business in Human Resources, Employee Assistance, or Training and Development, or for management consulting firms.

Prerequisite to Practice: License as a psychologist

Licensure Requirements: Doctoral degree in industrial/organizational psychology and 3000 hours experience.

School Psychologist - School psychologists provide a range of psychological diagnosis, assessment, intervention and prevention services with a special focus on the developmental processes of children and youth within the context of schools, families, and other systems. They also work with teachers, parents and administrators in assisting with need for specific children as well as program development and evaluation. Compared to a school counselor, school psychologists do more testing and assessment, and work with children with more chronic or severe emotional and developmental difficulties.

Prerequisite to Practice: Certificate as a school psychologist or license a psychologist. Note: While many persons are now practicing school psychology with a certificate from their state, the APA requires anyone using the title “Psychologist” to have a doctoral degree and be licensed at the doctoral level.

Certificate requirements: Varies by state, but usually a Master’s degree and at least one year experience.

Licensure Requirements: For a license, a doctoral degree in school psychology and 3000 hours experience.

Child Clinical Psychologist - Child clinical psychologists are clinical psychologists with an emphasis and additional study in child development. In addition, the child clinical psychologist has an increased focus on social psychology, counseling psychology and testing.

Prerequisite to Practice: License as a psychologist

Licensure Requirements: Doctoral degree in clinical psychology and 3000 hours of experience.

Careers Requiring a Master’s Degree

General Background Information - Two things are important in choosing a Master’s program. First, if you are going into a field that requires a license or certificate, be sure the program you choose is already pre-approved by the appropriate licensing body in that state. If the coursework from the program is not pre-approved, it is probably because extensive paperwork will be required by the licensing body before coursework from that program is accepted. Second, unless you are certain that you will never want to a more advanced degree, be sure the program you choose is

accredited. This will save you at least a year of coursework if you decide later to get a Doctorate degree.

For most people who want to provide general counseling in California, the decision will be between working as a Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) or working as a Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor (LPCC).

Licensed Clinical Social Worker - LCSWs most often work as therapists either in private practice or in community agencies. They provide counseling services to individuals, couples and families and also do a fair amount of outreach and mental health education in their communities. Their training includes a master degree in social work with a psychiatric specialty and extended training in counseling. If you are considering work in a hospital or social service agency, this may be the better choice, as there is a rich history between social workers and hospitals and community centers.

Prerequisite to Practice: License as a social worker

Licensure Requirements: Masters degree in social work (MSW) with a psychiatric specialization and 3000 hours experience.

Counselor - As of 2009, all 50 states have passed some form of counselor credentialing legislation. States use such titles as Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor, Certified Professional Counselor, Licensed Mental Health Counselor, Marriage Family Therapist, etc. Counselors work either in private practice or in mental health agencies, providing counseling services to individuals, couples and families. **Prerequisite to Practice:** In 50 states, counselors need either a certificate or license to practice. **Licensure Requirements:** Master’s degree from a counseling, clinical, rehabilitation, or related psychology program and a minimum of 3000 hours supervised clinical experience, and passage of the National Counselor Examination (NCE) or equivalent.

School Counselor - School counselors work with students in either elementary, middle (junior high) or high schools. The nature of the job varies depending on the school where the counselor works. Elementary school counselors do more testing and assessment and may travel to several different elementary schools in a week. Middle and high school counselors do more academic advising and assist students with college preparation and vocational development. All school counselors work with students as well as with teachers, school administrators and students’ parents and families.

Prerequisite to Practice: Either a certificate or license to practice, depending on the state.



Licensure Requirements: Each state has slightly different requirements. All require a Master's degree in school counseling or a related field and most require counseling experience plus one to three years of teaching experience.

Rehabilitation Counselor - Rehab counselors provide psychological and vocational counseling for individuals who become mentally or physically disabled. They most often work with clients who have had recent injuries to help them adjust to their new condition and find suitable vocational alternatives.

Prerequisite to Practice: Most states require a Bachelor's degree and two years of experience or a Master's degree in rehabilitation counseling. While no state agencies list certification as a job requirement, you can get certified by the commission on Rehabilitation Counseling, which requires a Master's degree and five years of experience.

Vocational or Career Counselor - Career counselors provide career assessment, vocational testing, and job search training. It is typically a good option for counselors who are action oriented and goal directed. They work in employment services, prisons, mental hospitals and schools (most two- and four-year post-secondary institutions have career centers).

Prerequisite to Practice: A Master's degree is typical, at least for career counselors at schools and universities. Career counselors may take the National Career Counseling Certification test and become certified career counselors. For graduate training, a number of counseling psychology programs offer a specialization in career counseling.

College Student Personnel Counselor - There are various student service departments on campus that hire counselors or advisors to work with college students. These might include Residence Halls, the Financial Aid Office, Admissions, Minority Student Services, etc. In addition, some academic departments hire advisors as well. Each job is slightly different and will require different background.

Prerequisite to Practice: While there is no specific prerequisite to practice, a Master's degree in education, educational administration, counseling, student development, or a related degree can be helpful.

Psychiatric Nurse - Psychiatric nurses assist licensed providers with administering various types of therapy in inpatient facilities and hospitals. They may provide a good deal of counseling to the patients. Requirements include an R.N. from a school of nursing. A Master's degree in psychiatric/mental health nursing and two years of supervised counseling experience in psychiatric/mental health nursing are required.

Other Careers

There are a number of careers that can broadly be defined as counseling related that do not require advanced degrees. This list is not exhaustive, but is representative of these types of careers.

Psychiatric Technician - Like a psychiatric nurse, psych techs usually work in in-patient facilities. They also have a good deal of contact with patients and may provide counseling as well. They generally need a Bachelor's degree and certificate from a one year psych tech training program.

House Parents - Residential treatment centers, mental hospitals, group homes, half way houses, women's shelters, etc. often hire people as residential supervisors. They oversee the operations of the units and ensure that residents are getting their needs met as well as complying with the site's policies and procedures. They may or may not have a Bachelor's or other degree.

Pastoral Counselor - Many clergy members spend a great deal of their time counseling in the areas of teen pregnancy, marriage problems, drug abuse, comforting the bereaved, etc. Most clergy have an advanced degree from a school of divinity or theology as well as training from the perspective in counseling. .

Drug and Alcohol Counseling - Most drug and alcohol treatment is administered by one of the licensed professions listed previously. However, with a Bachelor's and a certificate in Substance Abuse Counseling (or similar), one may be able to provide this type of counseling. Check the state Department of Health Care Services in the state you plan to practice.

*Other related careers might include youth services worker (especially education teacher), speech therapist, occupational therapist, probation officer, recreation worker, human resources worker, etc.