

Types of Mental Health Professionals

Which Mental Health Professional Is Right For Me?

There are many types of mental health professionals. Finding the right one for you may require some research. Often it is a good idea to first describe the symptoms and/or problems to your family physician or clergy. He or she can suggest the type of mental health professional you should call.

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Psychiatrist- Medical doctor with special training in the diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional illnesses. Like other doctors, psychiatrists are qualified to prescribe medication. Qualifications: Should have a state license and be Board eligible or certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology.

Child/Adolescent Psychiatrist- Medical doctor with special training in the diagnosis and treatment of emotional and behavioral problems in children. Child/Adolescent psychiatrists are qualified to prescribe medication. Qualifications: Should have a state license and be Board eligible or certified by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology.

Psychologist- Holds a doctoral degree in psychology from an accredited/designated doctoral program in psychology and two years of supervised professional experience, including a year-long internship from an approved internship. Trained to make diagnoses and provide individual and group therapy. Qualifications: For some psychologists, credentialing as a health service provider in psychology.

Clinical Social Worker- Holds a Master's Degree in social work from an accredited graduate program. Trained to make diagnoses and provide individual and group counseling. Qualifications: State license; may be member of the Academy of Certified Social Workers.

Licensed Professional Counselor- Holds a Master's Degree in psychology, counseling or a related field. Trained to diagnose and provide individual and group counseling. Qualifications: State license.

Mental Health Counselor- Holds a Master's Degree and several years of supervised clinical work experience. Trained to diagnose and provide individual and group counseling. Qualifications: Certification by the National Academy of Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselors.

Certified Substance Abuse Counselor- Counselor with specific clinical training in alcohol and

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drug abuse. Trained to diagnose and provide individual and group counseling. Qualifications: State license.

Nurse Psychotherapist- A registered nurse who is trained in the practice of psychiatric and mental health nursing. Trained to diagnose and provide individual and group counseling. Qualifications: Certification, State license.

Marital and Family Therapist- A counselor with a Master's Degree, with special education and training in marital and family therapy. Trained to diagnose and provide individual and group counseling. Qualifications: State license

Pastoral Counselor- Clergy with training in clinical pastoral education. Trained to diagnose and provide individual and group counseling. Qualifications: Certification from American Association of Pastoral Counselors.

You Make the Call to the Mental Health Professional...Now What Do You Do?

Spend a few minutes talking with him or her on the phone, ask about their approach to working with patients, their philosophy, whether or not they have a specialty or concentration (some psychologists for instance specialize in family counseling, or child counseling, while others specialize in divorce or coping with the loss of a loved one.) If you feel comfortable talking to the counselor or doctor, the next step is to make an appointment.

On your first visit, the counselor or the doctor, will want to get to know you and why you called him or her. The counselor will want to know-- what you think the problem is, about your life, what you do, where you live, with whom you live. It is also common to be asked about your family and friends. This information helps the professional to assess your situation and develop a plan for treatment. If you don't feel comfortable with the professional after the first, or even several visits, talk about your feelings at your next meeting. Don't be afraid to contact another counselor. Feeling comfortable with the professional you choose is very important to the success of your treatment.

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