

Mental health workers can take the form of counselors, psychologists, social workers and therapists. Also called psychotherapists, these professionals help patients with mental illnesses or emotional problems such as depression, anxiety, panic, phobia, marital or sexual dysfunction, grief, stress-related ailments, employment problems, and substance abuse. These professionals are required by most states to be licensed, certified or registered by a board of professionals within each state. National certification exists for some professions. Reciprocity regarding licensure varies from state to state. The licenses granted in California are Licensed Psychologist, Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW), and Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT). Each is trained to understand human behavior, to recognize various emotional problems and disorders, and to provide therapy. These professions require people with strong interpersonal skills such as listening and communicating, sensitivity, and analytical ability.

Licensed Psychologist:

Consult the American Psychological Association website at www.apa.org for more information on careers and graduate education in psychology.

- **Education:** The education required to become a licensed psychologist includes obtaining a doctoral degree (Ph.D., Psy.D., or Ed.D.) in psychology, educational psychology, or education with specialization in either counseling psychology or educational psychology. A Master's degree is not sufficient for this California license. Ph.D. and Ed.D. programs typically consist of at least two years of course work in topics including abnormal behavior, personality theory, developmental psychology, and clinical diagnosis and treatment. A period of clinical training in mental health facilities usually follows the required coursework. The time for obtaining Ph.D. and Ed.D. degrees normally spans four to six years, including time spent on an original research dissertation. The Psy.D. program (four to five years) usually includes all course and clinical work found in the Ph.D. programs; however, any required research component is much less rigorous and lengthy than in a Ph.D. program. More information about professional psychology programs can be found in the ["Professional Psychology"](http://career.ucsd.edu) handout on <http://career.ucsd.edu>.
- **Licensure:** After completion of the doctoral degree an internship year may be required. Prior to taking the licensing exam required by California, applicants must accrue 3,200 hours of required clinical practice under the supervision of a licensed psychologist. Once that exam is passed, the candidate is licensed and able to practice independently as a psychologist. California licensure information is available at www.psychboard.ca.gov. Practice settings range from private practice, hospitals, mental hospitals and clinics, community agencies, employee assistance programs, prisons, the military, colleges, schools, and rehabilitation centers, to consulting and academic research.
- **Preparation:** Preparation for a doctoral program typically consists of a bachelor's degree or equivalent in psychology, with emphasis on courses in experimental, developmental, or abnormal psychology, behavior, cognition, and personality, as well as experience conducting research as an undergraduate. These programs are very competitive, especially at the research university level. Many professional training schools exist, which are less competitive and may have fewer admission requirements. Applicants typically must submit GRE scores (General and Psychology Subject tests), letters of reference, transcripts showing strong undergraduate grades, an application essay and screening interviews as admission criteria. Some programs require the Miller Analogies Test (MAT), a one-hour test of 100 analogies.

Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW):

Information on careers and graduate study in social work is available online from the National Association of Social Workers (www.socialworkers.org) and the Council on Social Work Education (www.cswe.org).

- **Education:** The educational background required to become an LCSW in California includes a Master's or doctoral degree in social work (M.S.W. or D.S.W.). Most students opt for Master's level training, typically two years in length, including one or more years of coursework and about one year of practical clinical experience. A research thesis and a comprehensive exam may also be required.
- **Licensure:** After completion of the degree, up to 3,200 hours of clinical practice under the supervision of a licensed clinician are required prior to taking the licensing exam required by California to practice independently. Licensure information for California practitioners can be found at <http://www.bbs.ca.gov/licensees/index.shtml>. Practice settings include hospitals, mental hospitals and clinics, community and government agencies, rehabilitation centers, substance abuse and prevention centers, employee assistance programs and private practice. Consultation and teaching can also be career options.
- **Preparation:** Admission requirements of schools and departments of social work usually include courses (not necessarily a major) in the behavioral sciences; work, internship or voluntary experience in social service settings; letters of reference; GRE General test scores; competitive undergraduate grades; and screening interviews. Learn more about graduate study in social work in the ["Social Work"](http://career.ucsd.edu) handout on <http://career.ucsd.edu>.

Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT):

Career and graduate school information for marriage and family therapy is available at the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists' website at www.aamft.org. A California counterpart is available at www.camft.org.

- **Education:** The educational background required to become a marriage and family therapist includes a Master's or doctoral degree in marriage, family and child counseling, marital and family therapy, counseling (with MFT emphasis), counseling psychology, clinical psychology or social work. Typical preparation in California is at the Master's level with programs normally two years in length, including one or more years of coursework and about one year of practical clinical experience. A comprehensive examination is typically required for degree completion. A research thesis may be required as well.
- **Licensure:** After completion of the degree, up to 3,200 hours of clinical practice under the supervision a licensed clinician are required prior to taking California's licensing exam. Details on California licensing procedures are available at <http://www.bbs.ca.gov/licensees/index.shtml>. Clinicians with the MFT license typically work in private practice, community agencies, employee assistance programs, rehabilitation centers, religiously-affiliated organizations, and in some hospital settings. Consultation and teaching can also be career options.
- **Preparation:** Admission requirements usually include courses in the behavioral sciences; letters of reference; work, internship or voluntary experience in a social service setting; the GRE General test (for some programs); and screening interviews. Links to graduate program sites for specific admission requirements can be found at: <http://www.aamft.org/cgi-shl/TWServer.exe/Run:COALIST>.

Related Professions:

In addition to the mental health professionals described above who function as psychotherapists, there are other types of professionals who counsel and help people in need or distress. Some of these professions require a license, certification, or credential and some do not. These professions (with sources for more information) include:

- School Psychology, School Social Work or School Guidance Counseling (www.schoolpsychology.net; California – www.ctc.ca.gov/credentials/leaflets/cl606.html)
- Rehabilitation Counselor (<http://www.core-rehab.org/>)
- Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselor (California – www.caadac.org)
- Pastoral Counselor (www.aapc.org)
- Career or Vocational Counselor (California – www.ccdaweb.org)
- Creative Art Therapists – Art Therapists (www.arttherapy.org), Dance Therapists (www.adta.org), Drama Therapist (www.nadt.org), Music Therapists (www.musictherapy.org), Recreational Therapists (www.atra-tr.org) and others (www.artsintherapy.org).
- Psychiatrist (trained in medical school – see the "Medicine" page at <http://career.ucsd.edu>)
- Psychiatric Nurse (www.apna.org)
- Occupational Therapist (www.aopt.org) and Physical Therapist (www.apta.org)

Informational Resources:

The Professional and Graduate School Opportunities Program office of the UCSD Career Services Center maintains many resources and offers services which aid applicants to various psychotherapy and related programs. Our website provides information and links to schools under "[Mental Health](#)." A reference area contains information in binders on "Professional Psychology," "Marriage and Family Therapy," "Counseling" and "Social Work." It also includes books such as *American Psychological Association's Graduate Study in Psychology, Counselor Preparation*, and *The Social Work Graduate School Applicants handbook*. Interview preparation materials and detailed handouts on writing your application essay, obtaining letters of recommendation, preparing for admission tests, attaining financial aid and fellowships, and maximizing your volunteer experience are available on the "Mental Health" webpage at <http://career.ucsd.edu>.

The Career Services Center also provides GRE Registration Bulletins and an application essay critique service. Appointments with advisors can be arranged by calling 858.534.4939, or by visiting the Career Services Center. Career information about these professions is available in the Career Library at the Career Services Center (e.g., *Career Paths in Psychology, Careers in Counseling and Human Services, What Social Workers Do, 100 Jobs in Social Change*, and videotapes on these and related professions).