



MENTAL HEALTH  
PROFESSIONALS



CONTINUING  
EDUCATION



SOCIAL WORK &  
FAMILY COUNSELING

## THE BUSINESS OF PRACTICE



### Mental Health Counseling

#### Difference Between Clinical Psychology and Counseling

#### Why is Counseling Important?

#### How To Become an Online Counselor

#### Types of Mental Health Counseling

Mental  
Health



# Mental Health Counseling

Mental health counseling is a profession where a psychological healthcare provider diagnoses a mental health condition and provides a treatment plan. Depending on the degree a counselor holds, they are either able to practice independently or under the supervision of another certified therapist.



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[What Training is Needed to Become a Mental Health Counselor?](#)

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## What is Mental Health Counseling?

Counselors provide sessions that typically last between forty-five minutes or one hour with clients. Clients often return on a weekly or biweekly schedule. A mental health counselor's treatment plan determines the duration and frequency of counseling sessions.

Mental health counselors are able to distinguish their treatment styles based on their psychological ideology. There are a variety of specialties mental health counselors choose from when deciding to enter the field.

For example, a therapist may specialize in [Dialectical Behavior Therapy \(DBT\)](#) if treating mood disorders like borderline personality disorder or bipolar disorder. Moreover, a marriage and family therapist is a psychological healthcare provider who prioritizes knowledge with particular concern for couples and child therapy.

## What Training is Needed to Become a Mental Health Counselor?

First, a mental health counselor must obtain a counseling degree from an accredited school. A counseling degree spans two or three years, on average, after completing a four-year undergraduate program.

A counseling degree requires a combination of educational and therapy work. During the educational process, the student completes an internship while under supervision to gain counseling experience. Additional licensing is required to practice independently or [become a private practice therapist](#).



There are several categories of counseling degrees available at academic programs:

- MFTs or Marriage and Family Therapists
- LPCCs or Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors
- LCSWs or Licensed Clinical Social Workers

## Qualities of a Good Mental Health Counselor

A good mental health counselor is one who is effective at their job while they maintain their emotional health as a care provider.

The subsequent qualities indicate a successful mental health counselor:

- Empathetic
- Present and attentive
- Clear verbal and non-verbal communication
- Respectful of boundaries
- Up-to-date with research
- Transparent with treatment

## How to Start Your Career as a Counselor

After completing schooling for a counseling degree, decide whether you are able to take time off for licensure or look directly into available careers with supervision.

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To start a private practice, earn licensure through clearance of a government exam and completion of supervised counseling. The requirements vary by state and counseling degree, so be sure to confirm specificities depending on your needs.

- [MFT State & Provincial Resources](#)
- [Social Worker Chapters](#)
- [Professional Counselor State Board Directory](#)

## Salary of a Mental Health Counselor

Salaries for a mental health counselor will vary depending on the effort spent on personal brand marketing or available organizational funding. Counselors need to factor cost-of-living expenses in their session pricing depending on their location. Mental health counselors require a marketing strategy in addition to legal consideration when they [start a private practice in counseling and psychology](#).

According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors make a median salary of \$48,520 annually. A licensed mental health counselor makes on average \$83,474 nationwide, according to ZipRecruiter which averages self-reports of compensation. Salaries can typically range from \$30,000-\$150,000, depending on location and licensure.



## Where to Work as a Mental Health Counselor

Mental health counselors work in an assortment of settings. Traditionally, mental health counselors provide counseling in an office space or remotely online. Additional ways to utilize a mental health counseling degree include working at a nonprofit or as a consultant to businesses regarding the mental health of their workers.

- Therapy Office
- Private Practice
- Nonprofit Organization
- Hospital Network



# Difference Between Clinical Psychology and Counseling

Take a look into the differences, including career paths, education requirements and salaries.



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Clinical psychology and counseling both encompass roles in mental healthcare by diagnosing and treating clients, most commonly with talk therapy. Counselors and clinical psychologists who own private practices may have rather similar day-to-day agendas while other clinical psychologists who advance their careers outside of a traditional counseling role may deal with schools, courtrooms, corporations, or hospitals.

	Counselors	Clinical Psychologists
<b>Education</b>	2-3 years of professional training	5-6 years of professional training
<b>Degree</b>	Master's in a counseling discipline	Doctorate degree
<b>Therapy</b>	Complete a supervised internship to learn therapeutic techniques during graduate school	Complete a supervised internship to learn therapeutic techniques during graduate school
<b>Licensure</b>	Certain counseling professions are able to take a licensure exam and independently practice like MFTs, LPCCs & LCSWs  Mental health counselors without a license must work under the supervision of a licensed therapist.	Clinical psychologists who complete & pass a licensure exam are capable of private practice
<b>Median Salary</b>	Non-licensed: \$64,154  Licensed: \$78,609	\$115,542
<b>Emphasis</b>	Providing counseling & therapy	Producing research in addition to counseling, as well as evidence-based treatments to target specific disorders or symptoms

## Clinical Psychology

Clinical psychology is the field of psychology concerned with clinical practice in addition to the research of the behavioral and cognitive processes behind clinical disorders. Clinical psychologists provide therapy independently, diagnose disorders, and construct clients' treatment plans. Certain clinical psychologists become professors and conduct research on clinical issues.

The American Board of Professional Psychology classifies the below as a few of the fields available for specialization:

- [Behavioral health](#)
- Cognitive psychology
- [Counseling](#)
- [Forensic psychology](#)
- [Child and adolescent psychology](#)
- Couple and family psychology
- [Police and public safety psychology](#)

## Counseling

Counseling psychology primarily focuses on the therapeutic relationship between care provider and client. Counseling psychologists are able to see clients independently or under supervision, diagnose disorders, and construct treatment plans like clinical psychologists.

Additionally, counseling psychology looks into the science of why counseling is effective and which therapy treatments prove themselves as evidence-based. For example, the APA lists cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and prolonged exposure as evidence-based treatment therapies for post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

## Clinical Psychology and Counseling Career Paths

Clinical psychology degrees are much more likely to end in a research-based or academic career compared to a counseling degree which often leads to a therapy provider role. There are also careers outside of academia which utilize the research of clinical psychologists such as forensics, police and public safety, and tele-health or digital healthcare providers. Outside of a customary therapy role, counselor careers include mobile crisis units, hospital assessment teams, and mental health nonprofits such as crisis hotlines or diversity initiatives.

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# Why is Counseling Important?

No matter what role an individual plays in life, people deal with inevitable stressors or trauma. Some individuals may choose unhealthy coping mechanisms in order to deal with those stressors. Counseling provides tools on how to maintain healthy cognitive processes and coping mechanisms with scientifically-proven therapy.



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## The Financial Costs of Mental Illness

Mental health counseling also helps mitigate the tremendous financial burden of mental illness, which costs society billions per year. The CDC reports a combined loss of over \$400 billion when only factoring in two mental health conditions in the United States: suicide and substance dependency.

Further, mental healthcare is an investment in an individual's overall longevity. When individuals lack proper counseling, they are without adequate resources to manage their difficulties.

Untreated mental illness impacts society substantially.

- The Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates suicide and suicide attempts cost the nation approximately \$70 billion yearly in medical and work-loss costs.
- Regarding behavioral issues such as substance dependency, the CDC states excessive alcohol is a \$249 billion loss which spans over healthcare, workplace productivity, collisions, and criminal justice.
- The National Association of Anorexia Nervosa and Eating Disorders (ANAD) estimates the cost of eating disorders at \$64.7 billion annually.





Many communities possess financial and accessibility barriers to the mental healthcare system currently. Both the community and the individuals who live within are at a loss when society fails to invest in preventative measures.

Counseling allows individuals to reassess their current behavior and thought patterns while they establish beneficial alternatives. The APA reports [psychotherapy effectiveness](#) for a broad range of individuals, couples, families, disorders, and symptoms.

## Research Proves Counseling is Effective

Through established research, [evidence-based therapy](#) methods have been developed and shown to be effective. When mental health counselors employ these evidence-based therapy techniques, their clients see improvement in their mental health symptoms. Research provides a time frame recommendation for how often and frequently a client needs therapeutic treatment. Evidence also contributes to which types of therapy are suitable for specific diagnoses.

Evidence-based therapy techniques:

- For instance, depression and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) clients benefit from cognitive behavioral theory (CBT), so it now serves as one of the dominant, ubiquitous therapy options.
- Dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT) originates as a treatment for individuals with borderline personality disorder (BPD).
- Medication is also an evidence-based treatment, such as in the case of substance use disorder (SUD) or schizophrenia.

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Evidence-based therapy allows healthcare providers, policymakers, and governmental organizations to draw conclusions. These findings highlight certain mental illnesses and which demographics they affect most. The research behind counseling also permits advocacy work for appropriate funding and grants.

Most prevalent, counselors provide a mixture of therapy and recommendations to a psychiatry provider for appropriate medication.

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Depression or PTSD → CBT

Borderline Personality Disorder or Bipolar Disorder → DBT

Substance Use or Schizophrenia → Medication

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## Resources

Counseling equips individuals, partners, and families with the resources to handle behavioral issues that occur in their daily life. The financial costs of mental illness affect society as a whole and accessibility to counseling is most necessary in communities unable to afford the cost of therapy. When individuals take counseling seriously, improvements reveal themselves in their communication, relationships, behavioral, and cognitive patterns.

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Expand [counseling and clinical practice skills](#) with CONCEPT - Professional Training through the following courses:

- [Group Work Basics in Changing Times, An Application of Skills and Cultural Competency Amidst COVID 19 & Across Telehealth Platforms](#) by Cristen Wathen, Ph.D. and Melissa Luke, Ph.D.
- [Contemporary Legal Challenges in Counseling](#) by Theodore P. Remley, Jr., JD, Ph.D.
- [The Neuroscience of Addiction and the Role of Medications in Treatment and Recovery](#) by Mita M Johnson, Ed.D
- [New Perspectives on Counseling Black Men](#) by Courtland C. Lee, Ph.D.
- [Child and Adolescent Suicide: Prevention, Crisis Management and Postvention](#) by David Capuzzi, Ph.D.



# How To Become an Online Counselor

The path to become an online counselor is linear with the study and education requirements conventional counseling requires, although it is more highly compensated relative to other counseling specialties.



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[Select a Field & School](#)

[Complete Supervisory Hours & Internship](#)

[Join a Practicing Clinic or Start Your Own](#)

[Resources](#)

## Requirements

Either a counseling or adjacent bachelor's degree is a requirement prior to graduate school. Bachelor's degrees for those who aspire to become counselors include psychology, sociology, counseling, gender studies, cultural studies, and more.

**Those that launch an online counseling practice earn the highest median salaries by far, at \$103,956 annually.**

**According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor and Statistics, substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors make a comparative median salary of \$48,520 annually.**

**A licensed mental health counselor makes on average \$83,474 nationwide, according to ZipRecruiter which averages self-reports of compensation.**

## Select a Field & School

Counselors either earn a counseling degree or a psychology counseling degree. Clinical psychologists who specialize in counseling complete two to three additional years for a doctorate in comparison to mental health counselors who earn their master's. After deciding between a master's or doctorate, there is a chance to specialize in distinctive subjects.

[Digital Telehealth](#) and [digital therapy](#) coursework are important to prioritize throughout graduate school, aiding in foundational experience before application. Counselors who aspire to practice online must concern themselves with privacy, client confidentiality, and internet interventions.



## Complete Supervisory Hours & Internship

Mental health counselors complete an internship in addition to their graduate studies. While completing supervisory hours, strive to work for a clinic offering telehealth treatment options. Online counselors should have experience with multiple virtual modes of communication such as text, video chat, or voice call.

In general, counselors can only practice and see clients in states where they hold a license. If frequently traveling between a few destinations as a remote counselor, plan to undertake multiple licensing exams.

[Counseling Compact](#) is a new, innovative mission to enable licensed counselors to provide healthcare in the states which legally allow this interstate contractual agreement. This initiative allows mental health counselors who hold their licenses a unique way of expanding their clientele, administering therapy in underserved communities, and offering flexibility within the role of an online counselor.

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Currently, there are sixteen states in contract with [Counseling Compact](#): Georgia, Florida, Maryland, Alabama, Mississippi, West Virginia, Utah, Maine, Kentucky, Nebraska, Tennessee, Ohio, Colorado, Louisiana, New Hampshire, and North Carolina.

## Join a Practicing Clinic or Start Your Own

Mental health counselors are able to work for an established clinic under a licensed therapist, or they need to obtain a license if they want to practice independently.

There are benefits and drawbacks to [private practice](#). An independent mental health counselor needs to spend resources on finding clientele as well as encrypted virtual services and communication.

## Resources

To acquire additional specialization and expertise, explore elements and fundamentals of online counseling with a certification from CONCEPT professional training in the [Foundations of Digital Mental Health Certificate](#).





## Trauma Counseling

Unresolved [childhood trauma and its effect on adulthood](#) reveal demonstrated links between physical and mental illness to adverse events in childhood. Trauma counselors work with clients with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and acute stress disorder (ASD). Trauma counselors are also able to help individuals without a trauma disorder diagnosis explore life's distressing events.

Median Salary:  
**\$84,125**

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## Child & Marriage and Family Counseling

Depending on their specialty focus, marriage and family counselors may also choose to further their education between couples or child counseling. Marriage and family counseling requires a vast understanding of the family unit and the components which compose it.

Couples counseling is a foundational factor in marriage counseling as the objective is to reunite the pair's attachment and increase their relationship satisfaction. Counselors who desire to work with children earn certifications in specific therapy techniques such as play therapy or art therapy.

Median Salary:  
**\$86,444**

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## Guidance and Career Counseling

Guidance and career counseling are standard for mental health counselors in academic settings. Mental health counselors who work at grade schools with younger children prioritize and manage cases of learning disability, child abuse, and behavioral issues. Counselors who guide more mature students shift the priority to academic success, psychological well-being, and life plans. Career counselors also work in settings, such as governmental agencies, where they aid individuals in seeking employment.

Median Salary:  
**\$52,821**

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## Substance Use & Rehab Counseling

Mental health counselors also specialize in substance use and rehabilitation counseling. Substance use disorder (SUD) affects a range of individuals from adolescents to adults. Alcohol and opioids are common substances of choice resulting in counseling options arising specifically for each. Substance use and rehabilitation counselors deal with topics of relapse and overdose safety planning in their work.

Median Salary:  
**\$46,264**



## Online & Telehealth Counseling

Online counseling is a relatively new field, yet already with evidence to support its effectiveness. Telehealth increases accessibility for those who are unable otherwise to receive mental healthcare. Online mental health counselors translate their education into making a therapy session a constructive virtual experience.

**Median Salary:**  
**\$103,956**

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## Pros and Cons of Specialization

Specialization as a counselor does require effort and training beyond mandatory schooling. As an advantage, scholars who know which field they want to specialize in may apply to a graduate program to accommodate their training needs.

It requires additional financial resources, time, and training hours before receiving the benefits of specializing in a counseling career. Although, once a mental health counselor holds additional certification, they are able to expand their earnings as roles appropriately compensate for the supplementary skills in return.

### Pros

- Increase earning capacity
- Diverse careers available
- Proven competency can be marketed to clientele
- Further knowledge and expertise

### Cons

- Requires additional resources and training
- Must determine specialization early or enroll in training via continuing education credits & additional certification

## Range of Specializations by CONCEPT

CONCEPT Continuing and Professional Studies offers a range of specializations including, but not limited to the following:

- [Child Custody Evaluation Certification](#)
- [Civil Forensic Assessment Certification](#)
- [DBT Certification](#)





### **Jasmine Monfared**

Jasmine Monfared holds a post-bacc certificate in Counseling and Psychology professions from UC Berkeley Extension. She volunteers as a crisis counselor on a local hotline that serves 15+ counties in Northern California. Jasmine graduated from UC Berkeley with a sociology major and a minor in journalism. As an undergraduate, she implemented mental health curriculum in a faculty-sponsored sociology course with an emphasis on accessibility and diversity.