



Types of Therapists

Currently, many types of professionals are trained to use psychotherapy to treat people with emotional problems. Choosing a professional who is best for you will depend on your issue and personal desires. This list of professionals and their areas of expertise can help.

Psychiatrist

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who has completed medical school, one year of internship and three years of specialized psychiatric residency training. As physicians, psychiatrists can prescribe medication. They also receive training in psychotherapy. While some psychiatrists do “talk” therapy, many work with a psychologist or social worker who conducts therapy while the psychiatrist supervises treatment and provides medical oversight (i.e., medication prescription). A psychiatrist may be your best choice when your problem is particularly severe (e.g., psychosis, severe depression), requires medication or if there are medical complications (e.g., thyroid disease).

Psychologist

States have different definitions of the educational background required to become a psychologist. Most agree, however, that a psychologist has a doctoral degree (PhD or PsyD) in psychology. Psychologists also complete a clinical residency prior to licensure. Psychologists receive considerable training in various forms of therapy and development of specific skills (e.g., assertiveness training). A psychologist might be your best choice if your problems are moderate or if you need specific skills training. Psychologists can be seen in addition to a psychiatrist.

Master’s level counselor, social worker, advanced registered nurse practitioner

In addition to a college education and degree, these practitioners have two additional years of education and a master’s degree. Their coursework tends to be more hands-on and less theoretical than doctorally trained therapists. Often these professionals work with a psychiatrist or other physician to provide psychotherapy to patients.

Mental health counselors

These practitioners have training in a variety of mental health and mental health related fields. Their degree status can vary from PhD to BA. The therapists will likely have less experience with more serious psychopathology but can be useful for relationship issues or personal growth.

Pastoral care

Most religious organizations have clergy or others within their organization who provide counseling for members. These persons usually do not have advanced training in mental health and might not be helpful for the treatment of serious emotional or psychological problems. However, they can be helpful in exploring relationship issues. They can be especially helpful for persons with strong religious beliefs.

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