

Types of Mental Health Professionals

Which Mental Health Professional is Right For Me?

As you work on your recovery, providers can help you in many ways. They can help you to deal with current stress, heal old traumas, make decisions about medication and develop treatment plans that reflect your goals. Choosing a mental health provider can be challenging, but make sure you match your needs with his or her experience and specialty to get the most out of your treatment.

Over time, many people with mental health conditions say that treatment helps them: feel stronger, have a greater ability to cope with symptoms, and develop skills for building their relationships and pursuing goals. In fact, most people who seek professional help feel better. For example, more than 80 percent of people treated for depression improve, and treatment for panic disorders has up to a 90 percent success rate.

There are different providers who can help you.

Psychiatrist – Psychiatrists are physicians with either a Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) degree or doctor of osteopathy (D.O.) degree, who also has at least four additional years of specialized study and training in psychiatry. Psychiatrists are licensed as physicians to practice medicine by individual states. “Board Certified” psychiatrists have passed the national examination administered by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. Psychiatrists provide medical and psychiatric evaluations, treat psychiatric disorders, provide psychotherapy and prescribe and monitor medications. There are several subspecialty boards in psychiatry including child and adolescent, forensic, and addictions.

Psychologist – Psychologists has a doctoral degree (Ph.D., Psy.D. or Ed.D.) in clinical, educational, counseling or research psychology. Psychologists are also licensed by individual states to practice psychology. They can provide psychological testing, evaluations, treat emotional and behavioral problems and mental disorders, and provide a variety of psychotherapeutic techniques.

Nurse Practitioner – Psychiatric/mental health nurse practitioners (PMHNP) have a four-year college degree in nursing (BSN) and also complete an approved Master of Science in nursing (MSN) or Doctor of Nursing practice (DNP). PMHNPs are licensed by individual states and in some states are required to practice under the supervision of a psychiatrist. PMHNPs provide a wide range of services to adults, children, adolescents and their families including assessment and diagnosis, prescribing medications and providing therapy for individuals with psychiatric disorders or substance abuse problems.

Social Worker – Social workers have either a bachelor’s degree (B.A., B.S. or B.S.W.), a master’s degree (M.A., M.S., M.S.W. or M.S.S.W.), or doctoral degree (D.S.W. or Ph.D.). In most states, social workers take an examination to be licensed to practice social work (L.C.S.W. or L.I.C.S.W.), and the type of license depends on their level of education and practice experience. Social workers provide a range of services based on their level of training and certification. Typically, a bachelor’s level social worker provides case management, inpatient discharge planning services, placement services and a variety of other daily living needs services for individuals. Master’s level social workers can provide this level of services but are also able to provide assessment and treatment of psychiatric illnesses including psychotherapy.

Licensed Professional Counselors – Licensed professional counselors have a master’s degree (M.A. or M.S.) in psychology, counseling or other mental health related fields and typically have two years of supervised post-graduate experience. They may provide services that include assessment and diagnosis of mental health conditions as well as providing individual, family or group therapy. They are licensed by individual states and may also be certified by the National Board of Certified Counselors.

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist – Licensed marriage and family therapists (LMFT or MFCC) have a graduate academic degree (master’s or doctoral degree), clinical work experience and has passed a state-certified licensing exam. Most states offer this license. Along with the two- to three-year full-time master’s programs with a practicum and internship, LMFTs are required to complete 1,000 hours of individual or family therapy with 100 hours of supervision. 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.

Pastoral Counselor – clergy with training in clinical pastoral education Trained to diagnose and provide individual and group counseling.

Certified Peer Specialists –By becoming a New York Certified Peer Specialist, you are recognized as a qualified professional working with individuals in the mental health system based on “*The Shared Personal Experience*” paradigm. A CPS has 2,000 hours of supervised experience providing direct peer support and a minimum of 17 training courses offered by the Academy of Peer Services.