

Practice Areas in Psychology

Clinical Psychologist, Counseling Psychologist, School Psychologist

Clinical psychologists are concerned with the assessment, diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mental disorders. While some clinical psychologists specialize in treating severe psychological disorders, such as schizophrenia and depression, many others may help people deal with personal issues, such as divorce or the death of a loved one. Often times, clinical psychologists provide an opportunity to talk and think about things that are confusing or worrying, offering different ways of interpreting and understanding problems and situations. They are trained to use a variety of approaches aimed at helping individuals, and the strategies used are generally determined by the specialty in which they work.

Clinical psychologists often interview patients and give diagnostic tests in their own private offices. They may provide individual, family, or group psychotherapy and may design and implement behavior modification programs. Some clinical psychologists work in hospitals where they collaborate with physicians and other specialists to develop and implement treatment and intervention programs and others work in universities and medical schools, training graduate students in the delivery of mental health and behavioral medicine services. Others work in physical rehabilitation settings, treating patients with spinal cord injuries, chronic pain or illness, stroke, arthritis, or neurological conditions, as well as in community mental health centers, crisis counseling services, or drug rehabilitation centers, offering evaluation, therapy, remediation, and consultation.

Areas of specialization within clinical psychology include health psychology, neuropsychology, geropsychology, and child psychology. *Health psychologists* study how biological, psychological, and social factors affect health and illness. They promote healthy living and disease prevention through counseling, and they focus on how patients adjust to illnesses and treatments and view their quality of life. *Neuropsychologists* study the relation between the brain and behavior and use behavioral assessments to infer how well a patient's brain is functioning in relation to memory, problem solving, language and communication, visuospatial and related mental abilities. *Geropsychologists* deal with the special problems faced by the elderly. Work may include helping older persons cope with stresses that are common in late life, such as loss of loved ones,



relocation, medical conditions, and increased care-giving demands. They work in academic setting, research centers, industry, healthcare organizations, mental health clinics and agencies serving the elderly.

Child psychologists work with children, parents and families to assess and treat a variety of developmental and emotional problems that children may have. They work in settings that include academic research centers, schools, and private consultative/practice offices.

Counseling psychologists advise people on how to deal with problems of everyday living, including problems in the home, place of work, or community, to help improve their quality of life. They foster well-being by promoting good mental health and preventing mental, physical, and social disorders. They work in settings such as university or crisis counseling centers, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and individual or group practices.

School psychologists work with students in early childhood centers and elementary and secondary schools. They collaborate with teachers, parents, and school personnel to create safe, healthy, and supportive learning environments for all students. School psychologists address students' learning and behavioral problems, suggest improvements to classroom management strategies or parenting techniques, and evaluate students with disabilities as well as gifted and talented students. They improve teaching, learning, and socialization strategies based on their understanding of the psychology of learning environments, evaluate the effectiveness of academic programs, prevention programs, behavior management procedures, and other services provided in the school setting.

See *Careers in Psychology* sheet for information on subfields of psychology.

Education and Training

Clinical and Counseling Psychology

A doctoral degree in Clinical or Counseling Psychology is usually required for independent practice as a psychologist. Psychologists with a Ph.D. or Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.) qualify for a wide range of teaching, research, clinical, and counseling positions in universities, healthcare services, elementary and secondary schools, private industry, and government. Psychologists with a doctoral degree often work in clinical positions or in private practices, but they also sometimes teach, conduct research, or carry out administrative responsibilities.

A doctoral degree generally requires 5-7 years of full-time graduate study, culminating in a dissertation based on original research. Courses in quantitative experimental methods and research design, which include the use of computer-based analysis, are an integral part of graduate study and are necessary to complete the dissertation. The Psy.D. degree may be based on practical work and examinations rather than a dissertation. In clinical, counseling, and school psychology, the requirements for licensure usually include an additional year of post-doctoral supervised experience.

Licensure

Clinical and Counseling Psychology

Psychologists in a solo or group practice or those who offer any type of patient care—including clinical, counseling, and school psychologists—must meet certification or licensing requirements in all states and the District of Columbia. Licensing laws vary by state and by type of position and require licensed or certified psychologists to limit their practice to areas in which they have developed professional competence through training and experience. Clinical and counseling psychologists usually need a doctorate in psychology, an approved internship, and 1 to 2 years of professional experience. In addition, all states require that applicants pass an examination. Most state licensing boards administer a standardized test, and many supplement that with additional oral or essay questions. Some states require continuing education for renewal of the license.

Education and Training

School Psychology

A doctoral degree is required in most states for an individual to work as a school psychologist, although

some states credential school psychologists with master's degrees. Because their professional practice addresses educational and mental health components of students' development, school psychologists' training includes coursework in both education and psychology.

Licensure

School Psychology

The National Association of School Psychologists (NASP) awards the Nationally Certified School Psychologist (NCSP) designation, which recognizes professional competency in school psychology at a national, rather than state, level. Currently, 31 states recognize the NCSP and allow those with the certification to transfer credentials from one state to another without taking a new certification exam. In states that recognize the NCSP, the requirements for certification or licensure and those for the NCSP often are the same or similar. Requirements for the NCSP include the completion of 60 graduate semester hours in school psychology; a 1,200-hour internship, 600 hours of which must be completed in a school setting; and a passing score on the National School Psychology Examination.

Other Helpful Links

American Psychological Association, Division 12, Clinical Psychology
<http://www.apa.org/about/division/div12.aspx>

American Psychological Association, Division 17, Counseling Psychology:
<http://www.apa.org/about/division/div17.aspx>

American Psychological Association, Division 16: School Psychology: <http://www.apa.org/about/division/div16.aspx>

National Association of School Psychologists:
<http://www.nasponline.org/>

Recommended Resources

Graduate study in psychology (2010). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

Sayette, M., Mayne, T., & Norcross, J. (2010). *Insider's guide to graduate programs in clinical and counseling psychology*. New York: Guilford Press

Graduate programs in School Psychology:
<http://www.apa.org/ed/accreditation/programs/accred-school.aspx>

References:

Extracted from Bureau of Labor Statistics. (2010). *Career Guide to Industries, 2010-11 Edition*. Retrieved from Occupational Outlook Handbook: <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/life-physical-and-social-science/psychologists.htm>.