

How can mental health counselors help?

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- [Definition](#)
- [How they help](#)
- [Choosing a counselor](#)
- [Counselor vs. psychologist](#)
- [Costs](#)
- [When to seek help](#)
- [Summary](#)

A mental health counselor provides support to those experiencing mental or emotional distress. They may use a variety of therapeutic techniques to help a person manage anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions.

Worldwide, around [1 in 5](#) people have a [mental health](#) condition.

In the United States, around 46.6 million adults have a mental health condition. However, in 2017, only 42.6% of them accessed mental health services.

This article will discuss the role of mental health counselors, otherwise known as therapists or psychotherapists, and explain how they can help people begin to feel better.

What is a mental health counselor?

—Mental health counselors can help people with a range of conditions by offering advice and support.

According to [Mental Health America](#), a mental health counselor has received training to hold individual and group counseling sessions. They can diagnose mental health conditions, but they cannot prescribe medications.

To become qualified, mental health counselors must have a master's degree in psychology or counseling and have completed several years of clinical work experience. They must also pass the licensing exam in their state.

When they have completed these requirements, their full job title may be one of the following:

- Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor
- Licensed Mental Health Counselor
- Licensed Professional Counselor

Professional mental health counselors may work in a range of settings, such as health centers, hospitals, schools, prisons, or workplaces.

How mental health counseling can help

Mental health counselors can offer advice, support, and a safe space to talk about the problems a person is struggling with.

For example, they can help someone:

- understand their feelings
- identify issues that affect their mental health
- discover ways to overcome them
- learn new skills and coping strategies
- set goals for personal growth
- learn more about mental health conditions

All qualified counselors have received training to recognize the symptoms of [anxiety](#), [depression](#), and low self-esteem.

Specific conditions or life events that counselors can help someone cope with include:

- grief or loss
- [phobias](#)
- [addiction](#)
- anger management
- bereavement
- [eating disorders](#)
- relationship and family difficulties

- [obsessive-compulsive disorder](#)

Some counselors specialize in one or more of these areas. Counselors can also receive specific training to help people who have recently experienced trauma, sexual assault, or domestic abuse.

Counseling typically focuses on addressing the main symptoms or problems a person or group finds distressing. By doing this, counselors can help people overcome challenges, obstacles, or events that have affected their mental well-being.

Mental health counselors can teach a person healthy coping strategies or self-help techniques, or they can simply give people a space to work out solutions for themselves.

If appropriate, a counselor may also refer their client to other services that may help, such as a doctor, dietitian, or support group.

It is not necessary to experience severe symptoms to see a counselor. Many people attend counseling because they feel a benefit from talking about their concerns with a compassionate and nonjudgmental professional.

According to the National Alliance on Mental Health, it takes [11 years](#), on average, for a person with symptoms of a mental health condition to receive treatment.

However, seeking help early can reduce the impact that mental health conditions can have on a person's health, career, and relationships.

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How to choose a counselor

When choosing a mental health counselor, always consider:

- their qualifications and experience
- their area(s) of expertise
- their approach to and philosophy of counseling
- the tools and techniques they use
- the costs and insurance coverage

It is vital that a person feels comfortable with their counselor and can build a rapport with them. [Some research](#) indicates that the relationship between client and counselor is at least as important to the therapeutic outcomes as using the right treatment method.

If a person does not feel that they have a positive relationship with their counselor, they may wish to consider finding another.

Mental health counselors vs. psychologists

When looking for mental health support, a person may wonder whether they should work with a counselor or a psychologist. Although counselors and

psychologists can both help with mental health concerns, they may work in different ways.

Psychologists and psychotherapists may need to complete more work experience than counselors. Some counselors receive training to provide psychotherapy, but not all.

Psychotherapy looks at how a person's past experiences, learned beliefs, current behaviors, and subconscious shape their mental well-being. It includes a number of approaches, such as [cognitive behavioral therapy \(CBT\)](#).

In [most U.S. states](#), psychologists cannot prescribe medications. Mental health professionals who can prescribe medications include psychiatrists and psychiatric nurse practitioners.

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who specializes in diagnosing and treating mental health conditions. Psychiatrists can monitor the effects of mental health conditions on physical factors (such as [blood pressure](#)) and write prescriptions.

A psychiatric nurse practitioner can typically evaluate people and provide counseling. In some states, they can also prescribe and monitor medications.

Costs

The cost of counseling varies greatly depending on the counselor's location, training, and reputation. A person's insurance plan can also affect the cost.

Also, counselors with specialist training may cost more to work with. For example, CBT can cost over [\\$100 per hour](#).

However, some counselors and health centers offer lower cost options for people who need them, and they may charge fees based on a sliding scale. It is a good idea to ask about this when looking for a mental health counselor.

People with lower incomes may also be eligible for [Medicaid](#), which covers mental health treatment. The services available for people with Medicaid vary depending on their state.

When to seek help

People who frequently feel anxious, panicked, or depressed should seek support from a mental health professional.

A person may also wish to see a counselor or therapist if they experience:

- uncontrollable or intrusive thoughts
- compulsive behaviors
- [insomnia](#), nightmares, or flashbacks
- relationship or family conflicts
- the symptoms of an eating disorder
- sexual or domestic violence
- problems with alcohol or drug use

Suicide prevention

If you know someone at immediate risk of self-harm, suicide, or hurting another person:

- Ask the tough question: “Are you considering suicide?”

- Listen to the person without judgment.
- Call 911 or the local emergency number, or text TALK to 741741 to communicate with a trained crisis counselor.
- Stay with the person until professional help arrives.
- Try to remove any weapons, medications, or other potentially harmful objects.

If you or someone you know is having thoughts of suicide, a prevention hotline can help. The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24 hours per day at 800-273-8255. During a crisis, people who are hard of hearing can call 800-799-4889.

[Click here for more links and local resources.](#)

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Summary

Mental health counselors can help treat mental health conditions and other sources of distress, such as relationship problems or bereavement. They do this by providing people with a space to explore their feelings and by teaching them beneficial skills and coping strategies.

Counselors can also specialize in specific conditions, traumatic experiences, or addictions.

It is important that a person feels comfortable with their counselor, as their relationship with them will likely have an impact on whether or not their treatment works.

People may be able to access mental health counseling through [health insurance](#), government schemes, or low cost programs.

<https://www.medicalnewstoday.com/articles/mental-health-counselor#summary>

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Dr. Alex Klein is a licensed clinical psychologist who specializes in psychotherapy and assessment. He received his doctorate in clinical psychology from the Wright Institute in Berkeley, CA. He works at Kaiser Permanente Oakland and has a private practice. His primary interests include neurodiversity, couples and family therapy, social justice, parenting challenging children, consulting on educational programs, integrative approaches to psychotherapy, and the supervision of graduate students. Dr. Klein loves spending time with family and friends, music, and exploring the outdoors with his wife and twin daughters in the Bay Area.