

# Licensed Mental Health Professionals Consumer Fact Sheet

## **Board of Registration of Psychologists**

The Board of Registration of Psychologists licenses qualified people to practice psychology and protects the public health and welfare through the regulation of that practice in the state.

## **Board of Registration of Allied Mental Health and Human Services Professionals**

The Board of Allied Mental Health and Human Services Professionals licenses candidates who meet the statutory and regulatory requirements developed for rehabilitation counselors, mental health counselors, marriage and family therapists and educational psychologists.

## **Board of Registration of Social Workers**

The Board of Registration of Social Workers protects the public through the regulation of the practice of social work. The Board licenses qualified individuals at one of four levels of licensure, depending on that candidate's level of education and experience.

## **Board of Registration in Nursing**

The Board of Registration in Nursing licenses Registered Nurses and monitors professional conduct. The Board also issues authorization to nurses who have met its criteria for specific areas of advanced practice, such as Psychiatric Nurse Mental Health Clinical Specialist.

## **Board of Registration in Medicine**

The Board of Registration in Medicine licenses medical doctors, including psychiatrists, and monitors professional conduct. This Board is a separate agency within the Office of Consumer Affairs and is not part of the Division of Professional Licensure.

---

## **Licensed Mental Health Professionals**

When selecting a mental health care provider, be wary of those who use the vague terms "psychotherapist" or "counselor." Always look for a *licensed* professional. While it is not illegal for someone to hold him or herself out as an unlicensed mental health care provider, unlicensed providers may have not satisfied the same education and training requirements as a licensed professional. Unlicensed providers are not accountable through a board

disciplinary action if you have reason to file a complaint. You also may want to verify that someone practicing "unlicensed" has not had a license revoked by a state board.

**Psychologists** may have a Ph.D., Psy.D. or Ed.D degree, all of which are doctoral level credentials. Psychologists have received extensive training in research or in clinical psychology, with at least a year of supervised training after they receive their degree. Psychologists may also have training in psychological testing, used to diagnose difficulties such as Attention Deficit Disorder or organic problems. Psychologists are licensed by the Board of Registration of Psychologists. Professional conduct is monitored at both the state and national level.

**Psychoanalysts** already have a professional degree in psychology or psychiatry, which they have supplemented with at least two years of training at a psychoanalytic institute. Licensing may vary depending on the psychoanalyst's professional degree, and professional conduct is monitored by local institutes such as the Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute, as well as by the board that issued the license.

**Psychiatrists** are licensed medical doctors who have chosen psychiatry as their residency, or specialization. Psychiatrists can prescribe medication and often practice some form of psychotherapy. Licensing is provided by the Massachusetts Board of Registration in Medicine and professional conduct is monitored by the American Psychiatric Association, as well as by the state Board of Medicine.

**Psychiatric Nurse Mental Health Clinical Specialists** are Registered Nurses with additional special education in mental health care. These advanced practice nurses may offer mental health care which includes evaluative, diagnostic, consultative, and therapeutic procedures as well as prescribing medications. Psychiatric Nurse Mental Health Clinical Specialists must hold a master's degree in mental health nursing, meet the Board of Registration in Nursing criteria for advanced practice, and receive its authorization. These advanced practice nurses are also certified by the American Nurses Credentialing Center. The Board of Registration in Nursing licenses Registered Nurses and monitors professional conduct.

**Social Workers** have an undergraduate or graduate degree in social work or a related mental health field and are trained in psychotherapy and social work techniques. Family therapists and employee assistance program counselors are often social workers. Social workers who work in private agencies or independent practice must hold state licenses from the Board of Registration of Social Workers. Look for an L.I.C.S.W. (Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker). These practitioners have master's degrees and additional supervised experiences. A L.C.S.W. (Licensed Certified Social Worker) or a L.S.W (Licensed Social Worker) may practice in an agency setting under proper supervision. Professional conduct is monitored by the Board of Registration of Social Workers.

**Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists**, or L.M.F.T.s, may have a master's or doctoral degree from a graduate program in the field. L.M.F.T.s use psychotherapeutic techniques with individuals, family groups, couples or organizations to assist in resolving emotional conflicts, modifying perceptions and behavior, enhancing

communication and understanding among all family members, and preventing family and individual crises. These therapists must be licensed by the Board of Registration of Allied Mental Health and Human Services Professionals which also monitors professional conduct.

**Licensed Mental Health Counselors**, or L.M.H.C.s, hold a master's degree from a graduate program in the field. They may render mental health care services to individuals, families or groups. L.M.H.C.s use therapeutic techniques to define goals and develop treatment plans aimed toward prevention, treatment and resolution of mental and emotional dysfunction. Mental Health Counselors are licensed by the Board of Registration of Allied Mental Health and Human Services Professionals which also monitors professional conduct.

**Licensed Rehabilitation Counselors** work to maximize or restore the capacities of physically or mentally handicapped individuals for self-sufficiency and independent living. They apply therapeutic techniques in client assessment, job analysis, vocational assessment, counseling and job development. Rehabilitation Counselors are licensed by the Board of Registration of Allied Mental Health and Human Services Professionals which also monitors professional conduct.

**Licensed Educational Psychologists** deliver services to individuals, groups, families, educational institutions and staff and community agencies which promote mental health and facilitate learning. These services may be preventative, developmental or remedial and include psychological and psychoeducational assessment, therapeutic intervention, program planning and evaluation, and referral to other mental health care providers when necessary. Educational Psychologists are licensed by the Board of Registration of Allied Mental Health and Human Services Professionals which also monitors professional conduct.

---

## Choosing a Mental Health Care Provider

No matter what other factors influence your choice of a mental health care provider, the most important consideration is *comfort*. Finding a care provider with whom you feel comfortable sharing your thoughts, feelings, and the details of your life is a critical step to wellness.

To find a mental health care provider, consult your primary care provider or health care insurer, which may be able to provide you with a list of therapists. If your insurer does not have a listing, consider talking with family and friends who have experience with mental health care. If your employer has an employee assistance program, this is a great information source. Your church or synagogue may be another source of reliable recommendations. You may also want to contact your local community mental health center or any of the associations listed below.

Prior to committing to regular visits with a mental health provider, take time to ask questions and get to know him or her. If you do not feel comfortable and relaxed, you are not obligated to engage his or her mental health services. Often, a mental health provider can help you find the best match by referring you to another professional. Follow-up on the referral, and be sure to ask questions again.

---

## Questions to Ask On or Before Your First Visit

- Are you a licensed health service practitioner? How many years have you been providing mental health services?
  - What is your availability? Will I be able to schedule appointments frequently, if necessary?
  - I have been feeling (anxious, tense, depressed, etc.), and I'm having problems with my (job, marriage, eating, sleeping, etc.). What experience do you have helping people with these types of problems?
  - What are your areas of expertise - for example, working with children and families?
  - What kinds of treatments do you use, and have they been proven effective for dealing with my kind of problem or issue?
  - If medication is indicated, can you prescribe? If not, how will that be handled?
  - What are your fees? (Fees are usually based on a 45- to 50-minute session.) Do you have a sliding-scale fee policy? How much therapy would you recommend?
  - What types of insurance do you accept? Will you accept direct billing to/payment from my insurance company? Are you affiliated with any managed care organizations? Do you accept Medicare/Medicaid insurance?
- 

## What to Expect on Your First Visit

Mental health is a vital part of a balanced and healthy life. Seeking care is the first step to feeling better, but some people may feel anxious if they have never visited a mental health care provider before.

On your first visit, a mental health professional may ask you to talk about what motivated you to seek assistance. Are you having trouble with a relationship? Are you feeling worried, anxious or depressed? Are you having physical symptoms, such as dizziness or insomnia? Or, are you interested in long-term psychotherapy to learn more about yourself?

By listening to your response, the practitioner should determine if he or she is the right person to help you. In some cases, a different type of care provider would be more beneficial to you, or you might find group therapy to be useful.

Be prepared to talk about yourself, but remember that the mental health care provider is there to help you and may ask questions about your family, social, and medical history to guide the discussion. During your first visit, your mental health professional should also explain his or her fees and rules regarding confidentiality.

Therapy may be short-term (four to ten sessions) or long-term (six months or longer) depending on the problem being addressed and the treatment approach.

---

## The Relationship Between You and Your Provider

Each licensed profession has an ethical code and particular regulations which must be followed by the mental health care provider. These codes and regulations are enforced by the state licensing boards.

Your mental health care provider should refrain from entering into any kind of relationship with you other than a professional one. He or she is not permitted to take advantage of you in any way, whether through inappropriate physical contact or use of confidential information without your permission. Licensed mental health care providers are expressly forbidden from engaging in physically intimate relationships with current clients, and with former clients for at least two years after professional services are terminated.

---

## Filing a Complaint

While the majority of licensed therapists conduct themselves as true professionals, the Division of Professional Licensure will take action against those licensed by a board of registration who fail to maintain acceptable standards of competence and integrity.

In many cases, complaints are made by dissatisfied consumers - but, dissatisfaction alone is not proof of incompetence or sufficient grounds for disciplinary action. Cases are evaluated on the basis of evidence. The more evidence presented, the stronger the complaint.

If you have a serious complaint against a licensed *mental health counselor, licensed marriage and family therapist, psychiatric nurse mental health specialist, psychologist, or social worker*, call or write the Division's Office of Investigations and ask for a complaint form. Or, download a copy of the [complaint form](#) .

Division of Professional Licensure  
Office of Investigations  
1000 Washington Street, Suite 710  
Boston, Massachusetts 02118-6100

If you have a complaint against a *psychiatrist* , contact:

Board of Registration in Medicine

10 West Street

Boston, MA 02111

(617) 654-9800

---

## Verifying a License

To verify that a particular therapist is licensed, or to check a licensee's standing, call the appropriate board of registration. Or, do your own [verification](#) on our website.

- Board of Registration of Allied Mental Health and Human Services Professionals  
(617) 727-3080
  - Board of Registration in Nursing  
(617) 727-9965
  - Board of Registration of Psychologists  
(617) 727-9925
  - Board of Registration of Social Workers  
(617) 727-3073
  - Board of Registration in Medicine  
(617) 654-9800
- 

## General Information Resources

- **Massachusetts Psychological Association**  
195 Worcester Street, Suite 303  
Wellesley, MA 02481  
Tel: 781-263-0080  
Fax: 781-263-0086
- **National Association of Social Workers**  
Massachusetts Chapter  
14 Beacon Street  
Boston, MA 02108

(617) 227-9635

E-mail: [Chapter@naswma.org](mailto:Chapter@naswma.org)

Website: [www.naswma.org](http://www.naswma.org)

- **Massachusetts Psychiatric Society**

40 Washington Street

Wellesley, MA 02181

(617) 237-8100

(800) 831-3134

- **Consortium for Psychotherapy**

150 Clark Street

Brockton, MA 02402

(617) 965-0236

- **Boston Psychoanalytic Society and Institute**

15 Commonwealth Avenue

Boston, MA 02116

(617) 266-0953