

Pursuing a Career in Clinical or Counseling Psychology

ALL ABOUT CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGY

Clinical psychology is one of the largest specialty areas within psychology. Having a passion for discovery, learning and listening are part of what it takes to be successful as a psychologist who delivers clinical or counseling services.

Psychologists trained to provide clinical services work in research, education, training and health sectors. Others specialize in areas such as counseling and school psychology. Working with numerous populations, they focus on individual differences, normal and abnormal behavior, mental and emotional health, healthy behaviors and mental disorders and their prevention.

Health service psychologists are an example of psychologists working in clinical practice. They apply psychological science in their work in ways that range from helping patients overcome depression or anxiety to better understanding how to manage stress. Others specialize in physical health concerns and help patients manage diabetes or other chronic illnesses. Still others specialize in working with the elderly and the challenges of aging, or working with children or college students. The possibilities for a career as a health service psychologist are vast and varied.

If you are interested in understanding human behavior and enjoy working with people, a career as a clinical or counseling psychologist may be for you.

Psychologists who provide clinical or counseling services assess and treat mental, emotional and behavioral disorders. They use the science of psychology to treat complex human problems and promote change. They also promote resilience and help people discover their strengths.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Psychologists who provide clinical or counseling services are trained in a range of techniques and theoretical approaches, making hospitals, schools, counseling centers, group or private health care practices and hospital systems all good places to launch a career. Some psychologists working in clinical practice choose to specialize in treating those with chronic illnesses such as obesity or diabetes; others specialize in treating people with specific psychological disorders, such as anxiety, schizophrenia or depression. Others work with school children who have learning disabilities or in college counseling centers to promote wellness and academic success.

If you are passionate about working with special populations like children, the economically disadvantaged or seniors, you might consider looking at community-based organizations that work with these groups.

MAKING IT HAPPEN

The path to becoming a psychologist usually begins with a bachelor's degree in psychology, where students learn the fundamentals. You must then obtain a graduate degree. While some graduate programs accept applicants with an undergraduate degree in other disciplines, most encourage students to get a bachelor's degree in psychology.

Each graduate program determines its own entrance requirements. Some doctoral programs require applicants to have a master's degree in psychology. Some students enroll in programs that culminate in a master's degree, planning then to enroll in a doctoral program either immediately upon completion or after a few years of work. Others enter doctoral programs with only a bachelor's degree and work directly on a doctorate. Anyone working in psychology with a master's degree is usually supervised by someone with a doctoral degree. In most states, the independent practice of psychology requires a doctoral degree and a state license.

Most doctoral degrees take five to seven years to complete. Some institutions require their students to complete their doctoral studies within 10 years of admission to the institution. In addition, you must pass a comprehensive exam and write and defend a dissertation.

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Pursuing a Career in Clinical or Counseling Psychology, continued

If you want to practice as a psychologist in clinical, counseling or school psychology, you will also have to complete a one-year internship as part of your doctoral study in your area of practice. Some universities and professional schools offer a PsyD degree in lieu of the traditional research PhD or EdD degree. PsyD degrees, with their emphasis on clinical psychology, are designed for students who want to do clinical work.

WHAT YOU CAN EARN

In May 2011, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported that the median annual salary of clinical psychologists was \$67,800. The salaries of clinical psychologists vary depending on work setting, experience and work location.

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