

Which Mental Health Provider Is Best For Me?



The Mecca of Black Wellness



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After making the decision to seek mental health treatment, individuals may find it difficult to figure out what type of provider may be the most helpful. There are a variety of factors that can influence your choice of a mental health provider including treatment goals, symptoms, severity of symptoms, and the need for medication.

This fact sheet is intended to provide you with insight into the types of mental health providers and assist you in identifying the right provider for your mental health needs. While this list is not exhaustive, we have provided examples of different types of professionals who are trained to help with symptom reduction, stress management, and helping people thrive!

Mental Health Treatment: Therapy and Assessment

Licensed Psychologist

Licensed Psychologists earn a doctoral degree (Ph.D., Psy.D., Ed.D.) in a speciality area such as clinical, counseling, school, or educational psychology. Psychologists are trained to assess, diagnose, and treat a range of mental health conditions and challenges through therapy (individual, family, group, and/or couple's therapy). Psychologists do not typically prescribe medication, but if medication is indicated for treatment, psychologists can make referrals to another provider who can prescribe medication.

During the initial appointment, psychologists may conduct a clinical interview to gain a better understanding of the person's presenting concerns for treatment (e.g., panic attacks, grief, or adjusting to becoming a new parent) and to gather a background history of the client (e.g., duration of symptoms, family history, mental health history). This process helps the psychologist to determine the best treatment options to address the client's concerns and to help in the development of a treatment plan.

Licensed psychologists are also trained to administer and interpret tests and assessments that help to diagnose a mental health condition. Depending on the goals of the client, psychologists may use assessments to evaluate a person's intellectual skills, cognitive strengths and weaknesses, or personality and obtain more information about how a person may think, feel, and/or behave. For example in a school setting, psychologists can conduct testing to assess a student for ADHD or a learning disorder and provide recommendations on the best strategies for school staff and parents to utilize to support the student and increase success in the school environment.

Degree Requirement:

- Doctoral degree in (e.g., Clinical, Counseling, or School Psychology)
- Ph.D. Psy.D. Ed.D. or Master's level specialization (e.g., School Psychologist)

Licensure & Credentials (May vary by state and local jurisdiction):

- Supervised clinical experience during internship and following the completion of the doctoral degree
- Pass the Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology (EPPP)
- Pass a jurisprudence exam, if applicable
- Receive approval by a state licensing board that requirements have been met.

For More Information: <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/about-psychologists.aspx> and <https://www.nasponline.org/about-school-psychology/a-career-that-makes-a-difference>

Mental Health Treatment: Therapy

Mental health professionals often referred to as counselors, clinicians, and/or therapists, are trained to evaluate and treat a person's mental health through therapy. The specific services and therapeutic techniques that are used may vary based on the specific specialty, graduate training program, and the provider's area of expertise. Mental health professionals may offer individual, group, family or couples therapy and can collaborate and make referrals to different providers who can prescribe medication or provide a higher level of care, if indicated for treatment.

Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)

Licensed Clinical Social Workers are trained to assess, diagnose, and treat mental health conditions. This includes utilizing therapeutic techniques (e.g., Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), case management skills, and advocacy services, to treat and reduce symptoms related to emotional and behavioral disturbances.

Degree Requirement: Master's degree in social work (MSW) or a doctoral degree in social work (D.S.W., Ph.D.)

Licensure & Credentials may vary by state and local jurisdiction:

- Completion of a minimum of 3,000 hours of supervised clinical experience following the completion of a Master's Degree
- LICSW, Licensed Independent Social Workers
- LCSW, Licensed Clinical Social Worker
- ACSW, Academy of Certified Social Worker

For More Information: <https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/Clinical-Social-Work>

Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC)

Licensed Professional Counselors earn a Master's degree in psychology or a related field, and are trained to treat the mental health, behavioral health, emotional problems, and substance use among individuals, families, and groups.

Degree Requirement: Master's degree in a mental health field (e.g., psychology or counseling psychology).

Licensure & Credentials (varies by state and local jurisdiction):

- Completion of a minimum of 3,000 hours of supervised clinical experience following the completion of a Master's Degree
- National Counselor Examination
- State-Level Examination

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT)

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists are trained to treat mental health related problems through the utilization of both psychotherapy and family systems strategies. This means that marriage and family therapists provide a unique perspective to treatment as they typically aim to understand an individual's symptoms and manifestation of symptoms in the context of relationships. As such, problems are looked at from a relationship perspective.

Degree Requirement: Master's degree in a mental health field (e.g., psychology or counseling psychology).

Licensure & Credentials (varies by state and local jurisdiction):

- 2 years of supervised clinical experience following the completion of a Master's Degree
- National examination for marriage and family therapists conducted by the Association of Marital and Family Therapy Regulatory Boards (AMFTRB)
- State-level examination

For More Information:

https://www.aamft.org/About_AAMFT/About_Marriage_and_Family_Therapists.aspx?hkey=1c77b71c-0331-417b-b59b-34358d32b909

Mental Health Treatment: Medication

Psychiatrist

Psychiatrists are licensed medical doctors who have completed both medical school and specialized residency training in psychiatry. Psychiatrists are trained to assess and treat both the mental and physical aspects of disorders and are able to diagnose mental health conditions, prescribe and monitor the response to medications, and in some cases provide individual therapy. Individuals may seek a psychiatrist to address both short-term and chronic symptoms including adjustment to life transitions (e.g., mood changes following a divorce), depression or persistent feelings of sadness, panic attacks, hopelessness, ADHD, etc.

Treatment Modalities: Medication management, mental health diagnosis, therapy, and other medical treatments/tests as indicated and appropriate.

Degree Requirements:

- Completion of residency training in psychiatry
- Doctor of Medicine (M.D.)
- Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.)

Licensure & Credentials (varies by state and local jurisdiction):

- Licensed physician in state of practice
- Board Certifications: Board Certified Psychiatrist (Board of Neurology and Board of Psychiatry).

For More Information: <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/what-is-psychiatry>

Other mental health providers who can assess, diagnose, and prescribe medication (although requirements and privileges may vary by state) include Psychiatric Or Mental Health Nurse Practitioners and Primary Care Physicians.

What Type of Mental Health Provider is Best for My Needs?

1. **Identify Your Treatment Goals:** What do you hope to get from treatment? Are you looking to decrease your symptoms of depression? Are you interested in therapy (individual or group), medication management, short-term vs. long-term therapy? Once you have a better idea of your specific treatment goals, you can begin to narrow down the types of providers who best fit your needs.
2. **Concerns/Conditions:** Mental health providers treat a range of mental health concerns and conditions. When identifying a potential provider it is important to consider someone who specializes in an area that is specific to your current condition. For example, if you are seeking services to address marital challenges, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist may be the best fit. Or if you are seeking help to address an eating disorder, select a provider who has specialty training with treating eating disorders.

Additional Factors to Consider When Selecting A Mental Health Provider

- Education and Training
- Licensure: Licensed to practice in the state
- Services provided (e.g., Individual therapy, group therapy, family therapy, short-term therapy vs. long-term therapy)
- Insurance coverage, cost of sessions, location, office hours

Select a few providers who meet your basic requirements based on the information provided in this fact sheet and schedule an initial consultation call/visit to obtain more information. For more information on questions that you can ask a therapist, see the Black Mental Wellness Fact Sheet at https://docs.wixstatic.com/ugd/6ad2f0_1b169b6c6100478da4129c3b7cb10c9d.pdf.

References and Resources

American Psychiatric Association: What is Psychiatry

<https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/what-is-psychiatry>

American Psychological Association: What Do Practicing Psychologists Do?

<http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/about-psychologists.aspx>

Mental Health America: Types of Mental Health Professionals

<http://www.mentalhealthamerica.net/types-mental-health-professionals>

National Alliance on Mental Illness: Types of Mental Health Professionals

<https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Treatment/Types-of-Mental-Health-Professionals>

National Association of Social Workers: Clinical Social Work

<https://www.socialworkers.org/Practice/Clinical-Social-Work>

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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Resources to Locate a Mental Health Provider

- **Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator:** <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov/>
The Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator is a resource for individuals seeking treatment in the United States or U.S. Territories for both substance use and/or mental health problems.
- **Psychology Today:** www.PsychologyToday.com
Psychology Today's Therapy Directory lists clinical professionals, psychiatrists and treatment centers who provide mental health services in the US and internationally.
- **Therapy for Black Girls:** www.TherapyForBlackGirls.com
Therapy for Black Girls is an online platform dedicated to encouraging the mental wellness of Black women and girls.
- **Zoc Doc:** www.ZocDoc.com
With Zocdoc, you can see doctors' open appointment times and book instantly online, make informed choices with verified reviews, and stay on top of important checkups with tailored reminders.

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