

Psychology Degrees, Explained

What type of therapist do you need? Below are explanations of different types of mental health practitioners available. Please read through to ensure you're contacting the right providers for the services you need.

Psychiatrist (M.D.): Medical degree with a specialty in psychiatry

Psychiatrists are the only mental health specialists who can prescribe medication in California. This is the majority of what psychiatrists spend their time doing for the treatment of most mental disorders. Psychiatrists sometimes still practice some type of psychotherapy, especially if they're in a private practice.

Psychologist (Ph.D., Psy.D., or Ed.D.): Doctoral degree in either clinical or counseling psychology

These are the degrees of practicing, academic, and research psychologists. Training includes psychological assessment, theories and practice of different types of psychotherapy, research and statistics, as well as diagnosis and ethics. The title of "psychologist" in the State of California is reserved only for doctors in this field who are licensed.

Counselor/Therapist (M.A., M.S., M.S.W.): Master's degree in clinical or counseling psychology or social work, leading to the following licenses:

- L.M.F.T., Licensed Marriage Family Therapist
- L.C.S.W., Licensed Clinical Social Worker
- L.P.C.C., Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor

Master's level therapists are trained in psychotherapy techniques and case management, but typically have little or no courses in psychological assessment, theory, and research. Most Master's students either go on for their doctorate or become general psychotherapists.

Adapted from: Distinctions between Therapist Degrees

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