

Why Choose a Mental Health Counselor?

FACTS:

- According to the report, “Mental Health, United States, 2002” published by the US Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA), more than 100,000 professional counselors are licensed or certified for independent practice in the United States.
- The majority of national behavioral health managed care companies reimburse mental health counselors for services they provide.
- The median cost per session for mental health counselors is \$85, compared to a median cost of \$100 and \$145 for psychologists and psychiatrists respectively, according to the October 2000 issue of Psychotherapy Finances.
- All 50 states and the District of Columbia license or certify mental health counselors for private practice.
- Mental health counselors adhere to a rigorous code of ethics.
- Mental health counseling is a distinct profession with national standards for education, training, and clinical practice. The New York Mental Health Counselors Association (NYMHCA) is the professional membership organization that represents the mental health counseling profession in New York. Professional membership in NYMHCA requires a master’s degree in counseling or a closely related mental health field and adherence to a National Standards for Clinical Practice.

Graduate education and clinical training prepare mental health counselors to provide a full range of services for individuals, couples, families, adolescents, and children. The core areas of mental health programs approved by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs include:

- Diagnosis and psychopathology
- Psychotherapy
- Psychological testing and assessment
- Professional orientation
- Research and program evaluation
- Group counseling
- Human growth and development
- Counseling theory
- Social and cultural foundations
- Lifestyle and career development
- Supervised practicum and internship

Licensure requirements for mental health counselors are equivalent to those for clinical social workers and marriage and family therapists – two other disciplines that require a master’s degree for independent status.

A licensed mental health counselor in New York has met or exceeded the following professional qualifications:

- Earned at least a master's degree in mental health counseling or a closely related mental health discipline of at least 60 graduate hours.
- Completed a minimum of 3,000 hours of post master's degree clinical work under the supervision of a licensed or certified mental health professional.
- Passed a licensure examination.
- Mental health counselors practice in a variety of settings, including independent practice, community agencies, managed behavioral health care organizations, integrated delivery systems, hospitals, employee assistance programs, and substance abuse treatment centers.
- Mental health counselors are highly skilled professionals who provide a full range of services including:
 1. Assessment and diagnosis
 2. Psychotherapy
 3. Treatment planning and utilization review
 4. Brief and solution-focused therapy
 5. Alcoholism and substance abuse treatment
 6. Psycho-educational and prevention programs
 7. Crisis management

In today's managed care environment, mental health counselors are uniquely qualified to meet the challenges of providing high quality care in a cost-effective manner. Mental health counselors provide flexible, consumer-orientated therapy. They combine traditional psychotherapy with a practical problem solving approach that creates a dynamic and efficient path for change and problem resolution.