



MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELOR

JOB DESCRIPTION

Mental health counselors work with individuals, families, and groups to address and treat mental and emotional disorders and to promote optimum mental health. They are trained in a variety of therapeutic techniques used to address a wide range of issues, including depression, addiction and substance abuse, suicidal impulses, stress management, problems with self-esteem, issues associated with aging, job and career concerns, educational decisions, issues related to mental and emotional health, and family, parenting, and marital or other relationship problems. Mental health counselors often work closely with other mental health specialists, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers, psychiatric nurses, and school counselors.

EXPERIENCE & SKILLS

Persons interested in counseling should have a strong desire to help others and should possess the ability to inspire respect, trust, and confidence. Counselors must follow the code of ethics associated with their respective certifications and licenses. Essential skills are:

- Advising
- Ability to communicate well
- Lead small groups
- Provide support
- Assess student needs
- Objectivity

EDUCATION & TRAINING

A master's degree is typically required to be licensed as a counselor. Graduate programs in career, community, gerontological, mental health, school, student affairs, and marriage and family counseling are accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). While completion of a CACREP-accredited program is not necessary to become a counselor, it makes it easier to fulfill the requirements for State licensing. Accredited master's degree programs include a minimum of 2 years of full-time study, including 600 hours of supervised clinical internship experience. Some counselors elect to be nationally certified by the National Board for Certified Counselors, Inc. (NBCC), which grants the general practice credential "National Certified Counselor."

SALARIES

Salaries vary depending on work setting, years of experience, specialty and region or state.

Entry level: \$26,260
Average: \$ 34,530
Experienced: \$58,400

Elem and secondary: \$51,160
Junior colleges: \$45,730
Colleges and universities: \$39,110

Individual & family services: \$30,240
Vocational rehab services: \$27,800

EMPLOYMENT & ADVANCEMENT PROSPECTS

Employment of mental health counselors and marriage and family therapists will grow as more people become comfortable with seeking professional help for a variety of health, personal, and family problems. Employers are also increasingly offering employee assistance programs that provide mental health and alcohol and drug abuse counseling. More people are expected to use these services as society focuses on ways of developing mental well-being, such as controlling stress associated with job and family responsibilities.

RELATED OCCUPATIONS

- Human service assistants
- Social workers
- Psychologists
- Occupational Therapist

REFERENCES

- American Counseling Association at <http://www.counseling.org>
- Occupational Outlook Handbook , U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, www.bls.gov 2005-06