



SUBSTANCE ABUSE COUNSELOR

JOB DESCRIPTION

Substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors help people who have problems with alcohol, drugs, gambling, and eating disorders. They counsel individuals who are addicted to drugs, helping them to identify behaviors and problems related to their addiction. They also conduct programs aimed at preventing addictions from occurring in the first place. These counselors hold sessions designed for individuals, families, or groups.

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. Essential skills are:

- Assessing/Analyzing
- Ability to communicate well
- Using mechanical equipment
- Report writing
- Supervisory/Leadership skills
- Physical stamina

EDUCATION & TRAINING

Counselors must be aware of educational and training requirements that are often very detailed and that vary by area and by counseling specialty. A Master's degree is typically required to be licensed as a counselor. A bachelor's degree often qualifies a person to work as a counseling aide, rehabilitation aide, or social service worker. 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. Another organization, the Council on Rehabilitation Education (CORE), accredits graduate programs in rehabilitation counseling. Accredited master's degree programs include a minimum of 2 years of full-time study, including 600 hours of supervised clinical internship experience.

SALARIES

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

Entry level: \$25,840

Average: \$32,130

Experienced: \$40,130

EMPLOYMENT & ADVANCEMENT PROSPECTS

Demand is expected to be strong for substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors because drug offenders are increasingly being sent to treatment programs rather than to jail. Mental health counselors will be needed to staff statewide networks that are being established to improve services for children and adolescents with serious emotional disturbances and for their family members. Under managed care systems, insurance companies are increasingly providing for reimbursement of counselors as a less costly alternative to psychiatrists and psychologists.

RELATED OCCUPATIONS

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

REFERENCES

NAADAC, the Association for Addiction Professionals at <http://naadac.org/>

American Counseling Association at <http://www.counseling.org>

Occupational Outlook Handbook, U.S. Department of Labor Statistics, www.bls.gov 2005-06