

## Psychiatrists, Psychologists, Counsellors

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Navigating the mental health field can be tricky. A few definitions will help. **Therapy** is a process aimed at remedying an ailment. **Psychotherapy** (psychological therapy) is a form of therapy designed to remedy a psychological ailment. Psychological therapies are sometimes referred to as 'talk therapies' to distinguish them from medication, also used to treat psychological ailments.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century has seen many forms of psychotherapy develop, such as **Behaviour Therapy**. A person who is trained in and practices psychotherapy is called a **psychotherapist**. A psychotherapist could be a psychiatrist, psychologist, or mental health counsellor, each with a different form of training, expertise and attitude towards the use of psychotherapy.

### Psychiatrists

**Psychiatrists** are the most 'senior' professional in the mental health field. They complete a medical degree prior to studying psychiatry. They learn how to diagnose 'mental illness,' such as those listed in the Diagnostic Statistical Manual (DSM). The DSM is the handbook of mental health professionals who diagnose. It is revised periodically, adding 'new illnesses,' such as complex grief, and removing those that used to be thought of as mental illnesses but now no longer do so, such as homosexuality.

Psychiatrists make decisions about hospital admissions and the treatment and discharge of persons considered mentally ill. Other mental health professionals work with them and consult them about patient welfare. Psychiatrists have the authority to prescribe psychopharmaceutical medication (drugs that alter the brain), which other mental health professionals do not. Psychiatrists can also provide psychotherapy. They may work with both medication and psychotherapy, or exclusively with one of them only. You need a doctor's referral to attend a psychiatrist.

### Psychologists

**Psychologists** are trained in psychological theories concerning human behaviour. They deal with mental illness and behaviour in general. They are interested in people's behaviour under certain conditions, such as when they are under stress. Psychologists carry out psychological testing. Ratings will show 'before' and 'after' results, indicating whether a certain therapy is working.

Psychologists have varying degrees of training, with minimum requirements to practice as a psychologist. **Clinical psychologists** have extra training, such as an Honours degree and an area of specialisation. Psychologists do not prescribe medication. Not all psychologists require a referral, although you'll need one from your GP if you want to claim a Medicare refund.

### Counsellors

Counsellors train in the art of counselling at a university or recognised institution (such as the Australian Institute of Professional Counsellors). Training includes the use of the commonly used forms of psychotherapy, such as CBT (Cognitive Behaviour Therapy). Additional training can be taken, such as **Drawing Therapy** or **Narrative Therapy**. Counsellors don't usually diagnose. Although diagnosis is not part of counselling training, counsellors may learn about it on their own initiative or develop skills after working with many patients.

Counsellors rely on discussion and exploration, rather than medication or testing. The relationship between counsellor and client is the most important contributor to the client's recovery. You don't need a referral to attend counselling. If you think counselling could help you, get in touch below.

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