

Choosing a Behavioral Health Provider

Seeking treatment for mental health or substance use disorders can be a challenge, especially if you have never participated in therapy. The prospect of sharing one's problems with a stranger will feel more comfortable when you have done some research and feel confident that the provider is well trained, reputable, and a good match for you. This article seeks to explain the differences between the clinical professions and better equip you to choose a provider who best meets your needs.

Social Worker (LICSW, LCSW, PhD, DSW): Master's level social workers have completed two years of course work, which includes a supervised internship during the training. They are trained to do individual, family, and group therapy. Once licensed, social workers can practice independently to provide therapy.

Professional Counselor (LMHC, LPC): Master's level counselors have completed two or three years of course work, which includes a supervised internship(s) during the training. They, too, are trained to do individual, family and group work. Once licensed or credentialed, they can practice independently to provide therapy.

Psychologist (PhD, PsyD or EdD): Doctoral level psychologists have completed three to four years of course work, a year of internship, and have written a doctoral dissertation. They are trained to do psychotherapy and may also be researchers. Once licensed, psychologists can practice independently to provide therapy and some provide psychological testing.

Psychiatrist (M.D., D.O.): A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who has completed four years of medical school and also typically a four-year residency in psychiatry. A psychiatrist can prescribe medication and may also provide therapy, although many only offer medication management. Look for someone who is licensed by the Board of Medicine in your state.

Psychiatric Nurse (NP, CNS, PMHNP-BC): Psychiatric Nurses have Master's degrees in psychiatric mental health nursing. After a specific number of hours of advanced practice under supervision, they can take the certification exam. They are trained to do individual, family and group therapy. Once certified, they can practice independently and provide therapy. Depending upon one's state, a Psychiatric Nurse may be able to prescribe medication.

Word of mouth from trusted family members or friends is a great way to locate a provider and is worth a phone call to that clinician. If you are seeking therapy for a child, the school principal, school counselor, or pediatrician can be helpful. Please remember that KGA clinicians are available to provide assessment and consultation to help identify providers who meet yours and/or your child's clinical needs.

Please remember that you are a **consumer** in this process. It is okay to obtain several names and call to see if, over the phone, they sound like they have the style, training, and expertise to meet your needs. If they do, make an appointment. This does not mean you have to begin therapy or medication management services with them; the first appointment can merely be an opportunity for you to get more information and/or confirmation that the match is a solid one.

If you need additional information or would like to speak with a counselor, please call KGA at 800-648-9557 or visit us at [My.KGALifeServices.com](https://my.kgalifeservices.com). We are available 24/7 to assist

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