



First Alarm Wellness, A Family Counseling Corporation
Who helps the Helpers? We do!

How to Find the Right Mental Health Professionals to Support Your Emergency Workers:

Degrees and Licensure in California

When you're seeking a mental health professional to provide services to your department, it's easy to assume that the most qualified professional for the job is the one with the highest academic credentials -- but that isn't necessarily the case. Other factors come into play, and the answer for your department isn't always the one who's gone farthest in school.

California Requirements

The state issues four different licenses for mental health professionals. Each of these emphasizes a particular client approach within their respective programs.

While the training focus for each degree program is different, you might be surprised to know that the state's requirements for licensure are similar across all four professions, regardless of the program or the degree.

What All Those Letters Mean

It's important to know that only those with a doctoral degree -- usually a Doctor of Philosophy in Psychology (Ph.D.) or a Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.) -- can call themselves "psychologists." All others use the terms "therapists" or "counselors."

But even with a few more years in school and a dissertation, the clinical skills required by the state for those with master's degrees and doctorates are quite similar and *the number of hours of experience required before licensure are identical* (all applicants for licensure, master's or doctoral, require 3000 hours of clinical experience).

So, then what are the differences? Let's look at the various licenses:

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists

Marriage and family therapists are trained to counsel individuals, couples, families, and groups. The original MFT degree programs had their footing in Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory, which focused on how our relationships influence how we respond to stress and trauma. Even in individual therapy, relationships with family of origin and current family relationships were explored; our personalities and tendencies were not created in a vacuum.

Today, in the counseling office, LMFTs use Systems Theory as one of their many tools inside larger frameworks like Cognitive-Behavioral, Psychodynamic, Person-



First Alarm Wellness, A Family Counseling Corporation
Who helps the Helpers? We do!

Centered, or other paradigms that provide context for a client's history and current experiences.

Marriage and family therapists are qualified to diagnose and treat a broad range of mental health and relational issues, including mental illnesses, relationship dynamics, addictions, abuse, grief, and trauma.

Licensed Clinical Social Workers

LCSWs also receive extensive training in psychological theory and counseling techniques. The main difference between LCSWs and the other counseling professions is that they include extensive case management along side of counseling. They assess the various physical, emotional, and health needs of the client and help them access community resources to meet those needs.

Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors

LPCCs use psychotherapeutic techniques to help clients with cognitive, mental, and emotional issues. They are trained in addictions counseling, crisis intervention, psychosocial and developmental issues, and career counseling. They also can use clinical assessment tools to establish counseling goals and guide their clients in the therapeutic process. As clinical counselors, they're able to support and empower their clients in a multitude of situations, and the clinical and cultural knowledge requirements are identical to the other licenses.

Licensed Clinical Psychologists

Psychologists hold either a Ph.D. (Doctor of Philosophy) or a Psy.D. (Doctor of Psychology) degree. Psychologists have gone through more extensive coursework, developed and defended a dissertation on a specific subject, and have earned a degree that recognizes them as scholars and experts in the field.

When it comes to the treatment of clients, the key difference between clinical psychologists and master's-level therapists is the extensive training doctoral programs provide in conducting research and administering psychometric testing.

Both Ph.D. and Psy.D. programs emphasize clinical, research, and testing skills. The main difference between the two is that Ph.D. programs have a stronger concentration on research skills while Psy.D. programs spend more time on clinical dynamics.

Licensed clinical psychologists are also more likely to treat severe mental illnesses like schizophrenia and personality disorders than those with master's degrees, but



First Alarm Wellness, A Family Counseling Corporation
Who helps the Helpers? We do!

this is not an absolute rule. Specific training and experience are also factors, regardless of degree.

Differences in Training, Similarities in Licensure Requirements

In order to receive licensure in California, **all of the above practitioners** must demonstrate mastery of these areas:

Clinical Skills:

- Application of psychological theory and psychotherapeutic techniques
- Assessment, diagnosis, and prognosis
- Treatment of individuals, children, couples, families, and groups
- Treatment of trauma, abuse, & dysfunction; promotion of healthy environments & interactions.
- The ability to write professionally, including case notes, treatment plans, and documentation of progress.
- Assist clients in accessing community resources and support.

Socio-cultural Dynamics:

- Familiarity with different cultural dynamics
- The effects of socio-economic influences, including poverty, disability, and low-education levels.

Life Events with Various Cultural Influences and how these interplay with community life:

- Child and spousal abuse and assessments
- Cultural factors that interplay with incidences of abuse
- Childbirth, child rearing, step parenting, and parenting issues
- Marriage, divorce, and blended families
- Long-term care
- Poverty and deprivation
- Grief processes



First Alarm Wellness, A Family Counseling Corporation
Who helps the Helpers? We do!

- Effects of trauma
- Financial, social, and job-related stress
- Addiction and addiction treatment
- Resilience
- Sexuality

So What Should We Really Look For When Seeking Out the Expertise of Mental Health Professionals to Work with Our Programs?

When seeking out a mental health professional, these traits are just as important when searching for just the right person to provide care for your personnel:

Training and Expertise

If you want to know if a clinician is qualified to provide support to your staff, look at their experience from internship onward. Do they have relevant experience? Have they worked with veterans, first responders, or others who have similar mental health needs?

Licensed clinicians are required to continue their education in order to maintain their licenses. What post-graduate certifications have they acquired? What programs and trainings do they attend? Have they published any relevant material that shows their continued experience in relevant subjects?

Also, what perspective do they bring to counseling? What methods do they use? When dealing with the first responders and the environment that they function in, counselors who use empirically-proven methods (treatment methods that have been scientifically studied to be effective) are the ideal choice for providing services to your department.

Relatability

As much as we like to tout our methods, expertise, and education -- the number one factor for effective psychological treatment is the quality of the relationship between the therapist and the client. Trade magazine articles are full of examples of distrust of therapists who have personalities or lifestyle approaches that are different from the worldviews of the emergency workers.

While this perspective doesn't take the therapist's training into account, if a client and a therapist don't click, the counseling experience will struggle. A clinician who relates well to the members of your department is going to be the most effective in working with your department.



First Alarm Wellness, A Family Counseling Corporation
Who helps the Helpers? We do!

Budget

We don't like to admit it, but budget does play a part in the decisions we make, especially when caring for people using government resources.

Fortunately, when dealing with putting together a mental health support system for your department, you have a lot of creative options.

Choosing a Licensed Clinical Psychologist to lead your mental health support program can cover all of your bases should extensive assessments be necessary. For therapeutic counseling, both clinical psychologists and master's level clinicians are extremely qualified to meet the needs of your department.

Creative solutions

LMFTs, LCSWs, and LPCCs do tend to charge lower fees for counseling, education, and consulting services, though their level of first responder expertise is also a criterion in establishing rates.

- First responder clinicians vary in the services they provide and the support they offer. Some consulting groups are led by a clinical psychologist alongside other therapists, so the full range of services are available as needed.
- Good master's level therapists fully recognize that there are times that psychometric assessment or another colleague's expertise are necessary and they are able to refer and work with other professionals who can enrich the client's treatment plan. The goal is to ensure the client's well-being and bring healing.

The Full Picture

Incorporating mental health programs into the life of your department is a complicated process. Several factors go into deciding who the most qualified therapists are to provide support for your team.

All routes for licensure in California have similar requirements for experience and training. The process for licensure is arduous and the academic programs are tasked with graduating qualified candidates who will then work for about two years in the field before they qualify to sit for the examination. So every licensed therapist you encounter has graduated from a challenging program and has had at least two years of clinical experience. What kind of clients and programs has the therapist worked with becomes a more important question.



First Alarm Wellness, A Family Counseling Corporation
Who helps the Helpers? We do!

A sure way to approach selecting a clinician who will serve your department is to

- Consider the specific needs of your department
- Evaluate the clinician's experience and specializations
- Judge how well the therapist can relate to the men and women that you serve

This means that instead of selecting the best letters at the end of a name, you're selecting the best therapist to meet the needs of the men and women of your department.

If there is anything we can do to help, inside or outside of California- please don't hesitate to reach out!

Sources: _

[Statutes and Regulations Relating to the Practices of Professional Clinical Counseling, Marriage and Family Therapy, Educational Psychology, Clinical Social Work](#)

[The Difference between a PhD and a PsyD in Psychology](#)