

Counseling psychology vs. Clinical Psychology



Counseling psychology facilitates personal and interpersonal functioning across the life span with a focus on emotional, social, vocational, educational, health-related, developmental, and organizational concerns. Counseling psychology is unique in its attention both to normal developmental issues and to problems associated with physical, emotional, and mental disorders.

Clinical psychology is a branch of psychology devoted to understanding mental health problems in individuals and developing effective treatments for the full spectrum of mental, emotional, and behavioral disorders one may experience; depression, anxiety disorders, interpersonal difficulties, and psychotic disorders are but a few. Clinical psychologists are service providers, many of whom work in clinical settings while others choose academic careers or careers in consulting. As a group, clinical psychologists are skilled in clinical practice as well as research on clinical problems and clinical interventions.

What is the difference between counseling and clinical psychology?

Traditionally, the main difference between counseling and clinical psychology is their perspective and training. Counseling psychologist's focus more on the psychologically healthy individual where clinical focuses on individuals with serious mental illness (e.g. schizophrenia).

Counseling psychologists are considered to be the generalists, they are trained in a wide variety of basic therapeutic skills. Clinical psychologists are typically focused in one or a few areas (e.g. depression, substance abuse).

Degrees:

MA in Counseling: You will have quite a number of job opportunities as masters level counselor. With an MA in counseling you can work in a variety of settings are usually supervised by a PhD level psychologists. An MA in counseling generally takes 2-3 years to complete depending on the program and whether you do it full or part time (some programs require full time, others accept part time students). A negative though, is that each state has its own requirements for licensing so if you get licensed in one state, you may have to return to school to be eligible for licensure in another.

PhD in Counseling Psychology: These take about 5 years to complete. Generally you take 4 years for classes, research, and clinical practical, then complete an internship in the 5th year. You also complete a dissertation in the 4th year before going on internship. PhD programs generally require more clinical experience and involvement in research than masters level programs.

As a doctoral level psychologist from an accredited program can typically sit for licensure in any state.

Clinical Psychology: What is the difference between a PhD and a PsyD program?

A PhD program is a research-based program based on the scientist practitioner model. PsyD programs are sometimes referred to as practitioner-scientist model. So what does this mean? Well...PhD programs typically require much more involvement in research than PsyD programs. In a PsyD program you may only work on one project, that being your dissertation.

LICENSING TO PRACTICE PSYCHOLOGY (and having a "private" practice)

In order to practice psychology (and have your own practice) you must be licensed by the state. Most states require approximately two years of supervised experience AFTER you get your Ph.D., Psy.D., or Ed.D. You must also pass a national multiple-choice exam and, in many states, present a case study to a board of psychologists. You cannot advertise yourself as a "psychologist" or say that you offer "psychological" services unless you are licensed. These terms are protected by law. Being licensed also enables you to receive payment from your clients' insurance companies.

The A.P.A. recognizes four major specialties in applied psychology: clinical, counseling, school, and industrial/organizational. All professionals, regardless of their specialty, take the same state-licensing exam. If they pass the exam, all carry the same legal title in the eyes of the state: "Psychologist"

Clinical social workers also are permitted to have private practices as long as they have been licensed by the state.

In many states (but not all) people with masters degrees are not permitted to have their own private practice.

What do I need for admission into graduate programs?

Each graduate program varies with what its admission criteria are. Generally you will need:

- GRE Scores
- Letters of recommendation (the number can vary from 3-5)
- Good grades (an overall GPA of at least a 3.0 is the absolute minimum)
- Volunteer or paid experience in a clinical setting
- Experience in a research setting