

What is a Clinical Psychologist?

Clinical Psychologists have studied psychology at University, usually for six or seven years. They have specialised in learning about how the feelings, actions, beliefs, experiences and culture of people affect the way they live. They have learned how to listen to and understand people's emotional and psychological problems and how to help people make changes in their lives. All Clinical Psychologists should be registered with the New Zealand Psychologist's Board. You should feel free to ask your psychologist whether they are registered and what their qualifications are.

What is the difference between a Clinical Psychologist and a Psychiatrist?

A Clinical Psychologist has spent all of their study focusing on psychology, and has specialised in clinical psychology in the last three years of their training. A psychiatrist has studied medicine first, and then gone on to a further four years of study and work with mental illness. Psychologists only use therapies based on talking or doing things, whereas psychiatrists will sometimes use medication to help in treatment.

In practice, psychiatrists and psychologists often work in similar ways with similar clients, and often work together.

What happens when I see a Clinical Psychologist?

When you first see a Clinical Psychologist, they will ask you about the problem that has brought you to see them, and about your past and present life. Once you and the psychologist agree what your difficulties are and why they have happened, your psychologist will discuss with you the type of therapy they think will help you. You may continue meeting together or your psychologist may suggest you see another psychologist or therapist who specialises in the

type of help you need. They may also refer you to groups or other community services that may help you.

If at any stage, you do not understand what your psychologist is saying, you should ask them to explain again. You can expect a clear explanation in language you understand.

What is therapy?

Therapy involves you talking about the way you feel, think and act. The Clinical Psychologist listens to you and helps you gain new understandings of yourself so can make changes in your life. A number of things make therapy different from talking to a friend. First, your psychologist will have specialised knowledge of psychological research, theory and approaches to treating problems. This will guide the way they listen to you, challenge you and support you. Second, usually you will know very little about the personal life of your psychologist.

There are many different types of therapy a Clinical Psychologist may practice. These include:

- Helping you learn skills for managing problems;
- Helping you understand and change the way your thoughts affect how you feel and act;
- Helping you become aware of and understand your emotions;
- Helping you to understand how experiences in your life, even as far back as childhood, can effect the way you think, feel and act now;
- Exploring and changing the way you relate and communicate within your family and other relationships;
- Helping you understand how a psychiatric disorder developed and what keeps it going, so that you can take charge of it;

- Helping you and / or your family understand and cope with an intellectual or learning difficulty you may have;
- Using play and games to help children communicate their troubles.

A Clinical Psychologist may work with individuals, couples, families or groups. Therapy sessions usually last for about an hour. You may meet with your psychologist for only a short time or for a number of months. Before therapy begins your psychologist should discuss with you the likely length of the therapy.

What problems can I take to a Clinical Psychologist?

Most people see a Clinical Psychologist because they are feeling sad, worried, angry or in some way upset. The types of things people go to a psychologist for include the following (and many others):

- Stress
- Life crises or changes (e.g., redundancy, relationship break up, having a baby, retirement)
- Dissatisfaction with quality of life
- Work-related problems
- Anxiety, worry, panics, phobias
- Depression, sadness and grief
- Psychosis, hearing voices
- Anger outbursts
- Eating problems
- Chronic pain
- Substance abuse
- Tantrums, emotional disturbance, bedwetting, truancy etc in children
- Problems of teenagers (e.g., becoming independent, fitting in)
- Family, couple or relationship problems
- Sexual difficulties
- Childhood abuse

Do I have to stay with one psychologist?

No. You can change your psychologist at any point in time, and you can see a different psychologist before deciding who to keep seeing. However, it is usually helpful to talk to your psychologist about your plans to see someone else.

Confidentiality

During therapy your psychologist must respect your privacy. Clinical Psychologists are bound by ethical guidelines that generally prevent them telling any third person what you have said to them without your consent. However, there are some exceptions to this rule. The most important is that, if the psychologist believes you or another person may be in danger (e.g., they think you may harm yourself, harm someone else or be harmed) they can tell other relevant people even if you say they can't. They may also talk to their supervisor about what you tell them, but can usually do this in a way which avoids identifying who you are.

Supervision

All Clinical Psychologists should be in supervision. This means they will meet regularly with colleague(s) to discuss the therapy and assessment work they are doing. They will keep information that identifies you confidential, and the supervisor will also respect your privacy.

Supervision allows the quality of the psychologist's work with you to be checked. It is a time when another psychologist can ask questions that can help your psychologist expand and deepen their understanding of your problems and of working with you. Supervision helps to keep the standard of psychology practice high.

Training

Most Clinical Psychologists in New Zealand are members of the New Zealand College of Clinical Psychologists (NZCCP) and/or the New Zealand Psychological Society. All members of the NZCCP have undergone the equivalent of six years theoretical, practical and research based study in Clinical Psychology at university, followed by a further three years of closely supervised experience in helping people understand and solve their emotional problems. Clinical Psychologists are also involved in on-going training, reading and sometimes research to keep their knowledge of theory and practice up-to-date.

For further information contact:

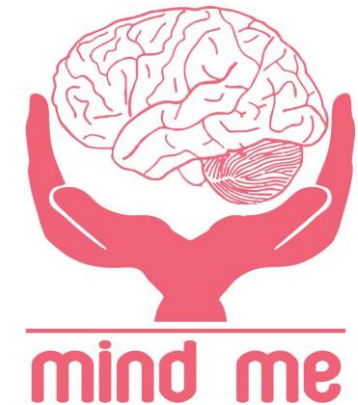
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A GUIDE TO SEEING A CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST

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