

Psychotherapist

Talk therapy as a job. Most people get here with a master's degree and two years of supervised hours, not a doctorate.

TYPICAL PAY

\$100,580

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$55k to \$181k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

6 to 8 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Group practices, community mental health agencies, hospitals,...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Solid grades and anything that gets you talking to people. Volunteering on a crisis line counts for more than you would think.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Psychology, social work, sociology or human services is the common route, but graduate programs accept other majors with some prerequisite courses.
- 3 Master's degree** 2 to 3 years
In counseling, social work or marriage and family therapy. Includes a supervised practicum and internship where you see real clients under watch.
- 4 Supervised clinical hours** 2 to 3 years
Roughly 2,000 to 4,000 hours after graduation depending on the state, with regular supervision sessions logged and signed.
- 5 National exam and state license** A few months
Pass the exam for your license type, clear a background check, and you may practice independently.

Pros and cons

- + Licensed in about half the time a psychologist needs
- + Demand is far ahead of supply almost everywhere
- + You can run a practice out of one quiet room
- Badly paid for the two or three years before licensing
- Insurance billing is a second unpaid job
- You absorb other people's worst weeks for a living

Good to know

The title is open, the practice is not

In most states nobody stops you from printing psychotherapist on a business card. What is regulated is diagnosing and treating mental illness, which is why every working therapist holds a counselor, social...

The relationship beats the method

Decades of research keep finding that the bond between therapist and client predicts outcomes at least as well as which school of therapy is used. Technique matters, but not as much as trainees exp...

Optional boosts

Trauma therapies. Substance use treatment. Child and family work. Clinical supervisor status.

Where these numbers come from

My Next Move: Clinical and Counseling Psychologists (19-3033.00)
National Board for Certified Counselors
Association of Social Work Boards
American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/psychotherapist>



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