


# **Considering Seeking Help from a Psychologist?**

**An Introductory Guide to Services  
a Licensed Psychologist May Provide  
and Your Rights as a Client**



The Washington State Examining Board of Psychology (board) invites you to take a few minutes to understand the qualifications of psychologists and your rights as a client.

## **What Is A Psychologist?**

- In order to qualify as a psychologist, one must:
- Have a doctoral degree from a regionally accredited university.
- Have completed 3,300 hours of supervised experience.
- Have passed the national Examination of Professional Practice of Psychology.
- Have passed the board's jurisprudence examination, which tests psychologists on Washington state laws.

A licensed mental health counselor, licensed marriage and family therapist, or licensed social worker is not required to have the doctoral education, training or experience a licensed psychologist is required to complete. Licensed psychologists are also required to continue learning new concepts, approaches and skills, which the board monitors through continuing education audits.

Psychologists may specialize in clinical, consultative or research areas. Their doctoral programs are built on a foundation of scientific psychology with courses in social and biological bases of behavior. In addition, they have completed intensive study and research within a specialty.

## Issues addressed by psychologists

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Abuse: sexual, physical, emotional	Eating disorders
Addiction: alcohol, drugs, gambling	End of life care
AIDS and HIV	Head injury
Anxiety	Learning disabilities and problems
Attention deficit disorder	Lifestyle issues
Autism	Medical: cancer, stroke
Behavior problems	Palliative care
Bullying	Physical disabilities
Chronic pain	Psychiatric disorders
Cognitive Issues: giftedness, limitations	Separation, Divorce
Death and dying	Sexuality
Depression	Sexual dysfunction
Discrimination based on age, gener, race, ethnicity or sexual orientation	Sports and Performance

## Services Provided by psychologists

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Adoption assessment	Group therapy
Alcohol and addiction counseling	Hypnosis
Assessment and diagnosis	Individual therapy
Bereavement counseling	Mediation
Brief therapy	Organizational consultation
Child in need of protective assessment	Program evaluation
Cognitive retraining	Pain control
Consultation	Play therapy
Couple therapy	Research
Crisis intervention	Separation and divorce counseling
Custody and access assessment	Sexual counseling
Desensitization training	Smoking cessation counseling
Disability assessments	Social skills training
Educational counseling	Stress management
Educational evaluation	Treatment for abusive partners
Family therapy	

## Court reports and testifying may involve psychologists

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Ability to parent	Motor vehicle accidents
Child custody and access	Parenting ability
Client functioning	Psychological status
Diagnosis for psychiatric problem	Psychosis
Coping styles	Release on parole
Incapacity	Sentencing
Intellectual ability	Sexual abuse
Likelihood to re-offend	

## What is the Washington State Examining Board of Psychology?

The board is made up of seven psychologists and two public members appointed by the governor for five-year terms.

The board's overall mission is to protect consumers of psychological services. The board's specific functions include:

- Adopting rules that clarify and facilitate adherence to the law.
- Examining qualifications of applicants for licensure and determining whether people may be licensed as psychologists.
- Reviewing, investigating, and when necessary taking disciplinary action against psychologists based upon consumer complaints.

## What are your rights as a client?

The laws and rules (Chapters 18.83 and 18.130 and chapter 246-924 WAC) that regulate psychologists are intended to protect the public by helping to ensure the competency of psychologists. These laws include client protections and rights. As a client you have the right to:

**Disclosure:** Before beginning a treatment program, expect to receive a written disclosure statement with general information about the psychologist's background, experience, theoretical orientation and approach to services. Fees and payment arrangements must be clearly stated. The statement must inform you that you may at any time refuse treatment or request a change in approach.

**Treatment plan:** Expect your psychologist to assess your needs and to develop a treatment plan based on psychological theory and research. You have a right to be informed about your treatment plan, to have input into it and to request changes.

**Confidentiality:** Your visits to a psychologist are generally privileged and may not be disclosed to any other person, unless you give consent.

Among notable exceptions are:

- If you are a danger to yourself or others.
- If the information involves the abuse of a child, developmentally disabled person or dependent adult.
- If your psychologist is required by a court to disclose information.

There are additional circumstances where information may be released without your authorization as stated in the Uniform Health Care Information Act (Chapter 70.02 RCW).

The details of confidentiality must be presented in the disclosure statement. Ask your psychologist to discuss this with you if you have questions.

**Complaint process:** The psychologist's disclosure statement must be clear regarding how any concerns you may have about services can be resolved and how to reach the Examining Board of Psychology if major concerns cannot be resolved. Laws (Chapter 18.130 RCW) provide for the investigation and resolution of complaints against psychologists.

### What is unprofessional conduct?

The laws and rules pertaining to the practice of psychology in Washington establish what is unprofessional conduct by psychologists. For example, it is unprofessional conduct for your psychologist to:

- Be involved with you on a personal level, or to engage in a personal relationship outside of the office.
- Have sexual contact with you.
- Inappropriately reveal your confidences.
- Charge fees for services not provided, misrepresent services or charge excessive fees.
- Practice psychology while impaired by alcohol or drugs.

You may request a copy of relevant laws that specify unprofessional conduct and code of ethics from the board by calling 360-236-4700.

### Be an informed and careful consumer

If you decide to seek psychological services, be sure the person is licensed. Carefully read the disclosure statement and have your questions answered

Be informed about the services you will be provided and understand that you may request changes or refuse services. Responsible licensed psychologists will be glad to answer your questions about their training, experience, office practice, assessment and treatment procedures, and will help you find another professional if you wish.

Contact the board at 360-236-4700 to confirm that a psychologist you are considering is licensed, if you have a concern or complaint, or if you would like a copy of the relevant laws. You may call the number above or see the Psychology webpage <http://www.doh.wa.gov/LicensesPermitsandCertificates/ProfessionsNewReneworUpdate/Psychologist.aspx>.

You may check the licensing status of a specific psychologist or other health care professional on the Provider Credential Search at: <http://www.doh.wa.gov/LicensesPermitsandCertificates/ProviderCredentialSearch.aspx>.



For persons with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. To submit a request, please call 1-800-525-0127. (TTY/TDD 1-800-833-6388)