

Who are Psychologists and What Do They Do?

Psychologists are **professional experts in the applied science of human behaviour**. Psychologists have a broad scientific and practical training in the assessment of, and intervention in all aspects of cognitive, emotional and social development. Clinical psychologists also have training in the assessment and treatment of disorders of psychological functioning.

All psychologists assist people to function better and enhance their quality of life. For example, they can teach people to manage stress, be more effective at school or work, or improve their relationships, etc. Psychological interventions have a wide application, and include individual, couple and family counselling, group therapies and organisational change.

Everyday problems, such as school or work stress, relationship troubles and coping with life changes, can seriously affect people's lives. Effectively addressing these common issues is vital to enjoying life and good relationships. At times, a Psychologist can be a useful influence in these areas in ways that can last a lifetime. Using an approach carefully tailored for each individual or group, **Psychologists equip people with the skills they need** to live more effectively and to prevent problems. Many decades of research shows that psychological interventions are effective: from managing many common life issues through to serious psychological disorders.

Are Psychologists regulated in any way?

Consulting a Psychologist ensures you receive expert psychological services of the highest standard. **By law, Psychologists must follow guidelines about professional conduct**, responsibilities and confidentiality that are set and monitored by the Victorian Government Psychologist Registration Board. Additionally, Psychologists who are also Members of the Australian Psychological Society (denoted by the letters 'MAPS') are required to have a higher level of university training. However, although sometimes misleading, it is also important to note that being a member of the APS does not *necessarily* signify that the person is automatically a Psychologist.

Are Psychologists different to Counsellors or Psychotherapists?

While there are specific laws that strictly regulate the title of Psychologist and Psychology (i.e. **Psychologists Registration Act, 2000**), there is currently no restriction on a person using the title "Counsellor" or "Psychotherapist" or describing what they do as "Counselling" or "Psychotherapy." **A person who refers to themselves as a "Counsellor" or "Psychotherapist" may not have any formal training nor be regulated in any way** by law or a professional association. Such people therefore are not held to account by a code of ethical/professional practice. However, please note that some Psychologists refer to themselves as Counsellors or may have undertaken additional post-graduate training as Psychotherapists – always enquire whether the person is a Psychologist, or not.

What sort of counselling, therapy or consulting can Psychologists provide?

Following an individualised psychological assessment of the person's intellectual, emotional, behavioural, and/or social situation and needs, Psychologists can provide a broad array of effective and evidence-based interventions that best address the current need or issue. These range from one-to-one counselling, coaching, couples counselling, family therapy, group therapy or organisational consultation. For instance, **talking based approaches** increase self-understanding, help to find meaning, facilitate emotional relief, teach practical coping strategies, improve social or parenting skills, or solve interpersonal problems, or deal effectively with crises. **Active techniques** can include, role-play for skill development, relaxation exercises, tailored activity scheduling, through to experiential methods such as wilderness adventure therapy. Sometimes simply obtaining **education** on an issue can be all that is needed. Also, **consulting** to parents, teachers or managers can be a very effective way of helping an individual, group or work team.

Are there different types of Psychologists?

All Psychologists have expertise in a range of general skills in dealing with common psychological issues. Specialist Psychologists have undertaken professional Masters or Doctoral degrees that focus on more specialised areas of psychological practice. Specialists are members of respective Colleges of the Australian Psychological Society (APS). Some of the more common specialist areas include:

Clinical Psychologists – assessment of, and specialised interventions with psychological disorders and the more serious problems of psychological and social development,

Counselling Psychologists – the use of counselling interventions with everyday psychological issues,

Educational & Developmental Psychologists – assessment of, and interventions for education-based and psychological development issues,

Further, sub-specialties also exist, for instance, **Clinical Child & Adolescent Psychologists** are Clinical Psychologists with a further sub-speciality with children, adolescents & families.

How are Clinical Psychologists different to Psychiatrists?

Clinical Psychologists are experts in both normal and abnormal psychological development and functioning. Clinical Psychologists' training represents a minimum of 6 years of university study plus 2 years of supervised clinical experience. **Psychiatrists are Medical Practitioners who specialise in the medical diagnosis and treatment of mental illnesses** such as Schizophrenia. Psychiatrists' training represents 6 years of study in Medicine and Surgery, and then several years of on-the-job training in psychiatric hospitals and clinics as a Psychiatry Registrar (trainee):

	Undergraduate degree	Post-graduate qualification	Masters degree	Registration requirement	Doctoral degree
Clinical Psychologists	3 year degree in Psychology	Honours or Graduate Diploma	2 years full-time specialist academic & professional training	PSYCHOLOGIST	3-4 years full-time advanced specialist academic & professional training
	BA, BSc or BBSc	(Hons) or GradDipPsych	MPsych, MA or MSc		DPsych
Psychiatrists	6 year combined degree in Medicine & Surgery			MEDICAL PRACTITIONER	
	MBBS				3+ years hospital/clinic practice as a Psychiatry Registrar (trainee)

Psychiatrists typically bring a *medical illness* framework to mental phenomena that emphasises diagnosis and medical treatments such as medication. In contrast, Clinical Psychologists typically bring a *normal continuum* framework to assessment and intervention with disorders of psychological and social functioning that emphasises individual differences and psychological health promotion. **As Medical Practitioners, Psychiatrists often prescribe medication** as a way to treat mental illnesses such as Schizophrenia and Bi-Polar Disorder, while Clinical Psychologists use non-medical interventions to assist people with psychological disorders such as anxiety, depression and behavioural difficulties to function more effectively. Importantly, many psychological interventions have been found to be equally effective, if not more so, than medical ones - for example, psychological treatment of severe depression.

Anyone can refer themselves to a Psychologist - Referral from a Medical Practitioner is not required.

Like to know more? Call and speak to a Psychologist at:



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