

Understanding the difference between health professionals who may offer counselling services

Many people get confused by the terms used by people who may offer counselling. Briefly:

- *Psychologists*: university psychology education, registered
- *Psychiatrists*: university medical and psychiatric education, registered
- *Counsellors and Therapists*: may have undergone professional training, no requirement to be registered



If I'm not happy with some aspect of my treatment by a psychologist, what can I do?

If you feel able to do so, discuss your concerns with the psychologist. If the matter cannot be sorted out between you then:

Report your concerns to the
NSW Psychologists Registration Board
Phone: (02) 9219 0211

and/or

Contact the
Australian Psychological Society
Phone: 1800 333 497
Web: www.psychology.org.au

What is a **REGISTERED PSYCHOLOGIST?**



What is a registered psychologist?

Psychologists specialise in helping people with their thinking, emotions and behaviour and are educated for six years.

Psychologists are registered and this means that they must be competent and follow a strict Code of Conduct. Not all counsellors or therapists are Registered Psychologists. Seeing someone who is registered ensures you receive high quality, ethical treatment.

All psychologists are educated at a university as part of an extensive professional education program followed by the completion of a significant period of supervised practice. Most psychologists obtain additional education throughout their careers and many join a professional organisation like the Australian Psychological Society. Membership of this Society requires a strong commitment to one's profession and guarantees ongoing professional development.

Generally psychologists see ordinary people who have become stuck with some difficulty like: trying to manage stress, recovering emotionally after a bad accident, or feeling really down about a troubled relationship. They also help those with more severe mental illness.

You might see a psychologist about

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Improving relationships or managing relationship breakdown
- Recovering from a traumatic experience
- Work-related problems
- Addiction
- Dealing with unwanted behaviours (e.g., eating disorders)
- The emotional effects of chronic illness
- Managing pain
- Getting through grief
- Setting & achieving life goals
- Enhancing your sports performance
- Lifestyle difficulties

How can a psychologist help you?

A psychologist must ensure that you feel comfortable, safe, respected and listened to, and that you understand the nature of the therapy you will engage in. These are the "basics" of psychological therapy and beyond this, each psychologist will have a different way of working. Whichever method is used, it is generally based on sound scientific evidence and a deep understanding of human psychological functioning.

There are some psychologists who specialise in certain areas which you could find out more about through the Australian Psychological Society website detailed below.

How do I find a suitable psychologist?

Psychologists work in government and non-government organisations as well as private practice. You could:

- Ask your GP
- Look in the Yellow Pages or on the web under 'Psychologist'
- Phone your local Community Health Centre
- Check at work to see if you can see a psychologist through an Employee Assistance Program
- Contact the Australian Psychological Society (freecall 1800 333 497) which maintains a list of psychologists for every area in Australia

Do I need a doctor's referral letter?

No. You might be referred to a psychologist by your GP; however, it's fine to contact a psychologist directly without a referral letter.

What should I be told either at, or before, the first appointment?

- Whether the psychologist has the right skills for the nature of your problem
- The type of treatment to be provided
- The number of sessions that might be needed to get the mutually agreed outcome
- If there is a cost, how much will it be and whether there is some way of recovering the cost.
- How records are kept and for how long
- Issues of confidentiality

It is appropriate to ask your psychologist such questions.