



FOR YOUR PEACE OF
MIND

A Consumer Guide to
Psychological Services

Table of Contents

The Board of Psychology protects consumers of psychological services by licensing psychologists, regulating the practice of psychology, and supporting the evolution of the profession.

Introduction: You're Not Alone _____	4
How Can a Psychologist Help You? _____	4
Clients' Bill of Rights _____	6
How is a Psychologist Licensed? _____	8
How Do You Choose a Psychologist? _____	9
How to Prepare for Your First Appointment _____	11
What to Expect During an Individual or Group Therapy Session _____	11
What to Expect During Psychological Testing _____	13
What Psychologists Are NOT Supposed to Do _____	14
What to Do if the Psychologist is Unprofessional _____	15



You're Not Alone

Every year, thousands of Californians visit professional psychologists for help. Perhaps you are seeking treatment for depression, stress, anxiety, or a better understanding of yourself or any challenges you may be facing. You or your family may be considering therapy to improve the quality of your relationships. Many people turn to psychologists for a variety of reasons. If you are reaching out for help from a psychologist, you are not alone.

This brochure will explain your rights as a patient, provide guidance for choosing a psychologist, and explain what a psychologist should and should NOT do.

How Can a Psychologist Help You?

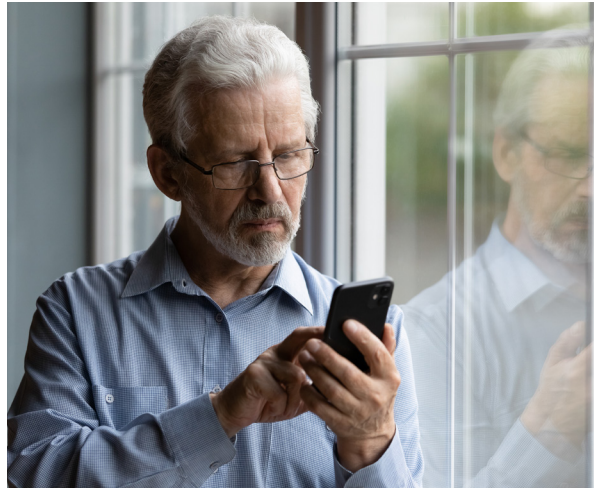
Psychologists help clients understand and treat various emotional challenges, such as depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. They are trained to consider the personal background of each client when assessing and treating them. They may provide treatment to individuals (children, teens, and adults). They also serve couples, families, and groups in the therapeutic setting. Here, they use a variety of treatment methods, which can include psychotherapy, behavior modification, biofeedback, or hypnosis. Psychologists provide these services in a variety of settings including outpatient offices, inpatient psychiatric hospitals, and day treatment

programs. As part of the care that psychologists provide, they may refer patients to physicians or psychiatrists for further evaluation, who can then prescribe medication when necessary.

Outside of working directly with clients, psychologists work with organizations and businesses, providing consultations or trainings. In these settings, their goal is to identify difficulties within the work environment, then recommend strategies for making improvements within the organizations.

Psychologists also develop, administer, and interpret psychological tests. Some of these categories of psychological tests or evaluations include the following:

- » Diagnostic evaluations (e.g., intelligence/IQ tests, autism evaluation, attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder [ADHD] evaluation).
- » Disability and workers' compensation evaluations.
- » Personality testing.
- » Behavioral assessment.
- » Fitness-for-duty evaluations.
- » Neuropsychological evaluations.
- » Career counseling/ planning evaluations.
- » Court-ordered or court-related evaluations (e.g., child custody, competency evaluations).



Clients' Bill of Rights

You, as a client, have the right to:

- » Request and receive information from the psychologist about their qualifications, which may include the psychologist's professional capabilities, including licensure, education, training, experience, professional association membership, specialization, and limitations.
- » Be treated with dignity and respect.
- » Access care in a safe environment, free from sexual, physical, and emotional abuse.
- » Ask questions about your therapy or other services from your psychologist.
- » Decline to answer any question or disclose any information you choose not to reveal.
- » Request and receive information from the psychologist about your progress toward your treatment goals.
- » Know the limits of confidentiality and the circumstances in which a psychologist is legally required to disclose information to others.
- » Know if there are supervisors, consultants, students, or others with whom your psychologist will discuss your case.
- » Decline a particular type of treatment, or end treatment without obligation or harassment.

- » Refuse electronic recording.
- » Request and (in most cases) receive a summary of your records, including the diagnosis, your progress, and the type of treatment.
- » Report unethical and illegal behavior by a psychologist to the Board of Psychology.
- » Seek a second opinion at any time about your psychologist's services.
- » Make a written request for a copy of your records or have a copy of your records transferred to any psychologist or agency you choose.



How is a Psychologist Trained, Educated and Licensed?

To be licensed, a psychologist must:

- » Have earned a qualifying doctorate degree (a Ph.D., Psy.D., or Ed.D.) in psychology from an accredited institution.
- » Have completed professional experience under the supervision of a licensed psychologist.
- » Have met the legal standards, which include passing both the national practice examination and the California law and ethics examination and completing specific prelicensure coursework.
- » Complete 36 hours of continuing professional development every two years.
- » Pass a background check.

Additional information on how a psychologist is licensed can be found on the “Applicants” page of the Board’s website: www.psychology.ca.gov/applicants.



How Do You Choose a Psychologist?

Step One: Investigating Your Needs

- » Identify an area in which you feel you might need some help (substance use and abuse, eating disorders, depression, anxiety, trauma, etc.), then look for a psychologist trained and experienced in those areas.
- » If you are unsure, a psychologist can also help you identify your needs.

Step Two: Find Psychologist Names

- » Ask people you know and trust for their recommendations, including your health care providers.
- » Conduct an online search using third-party sites, such as local, state, and national professional associations, insurance company directories of approved providers, and other lists of providers.
- » Contact your insurance provider for a list of approved psychologists in your area.

Step Three: Check License Status

Check each psychologist's license to confirm a "Current and Active" status on the Department of Consumer Affairs website:

<https://search.dca.ca.gov>. This allows you to view license status, as well as prior public administrative or disciplinary action, if any.

Step Four: Questions to Ask

- » Is the psychologist accepting new patients?
- » Does the psychologist accept your insurance, if applicable?
- » Does the psychologist offer your treatment in person, online, or by phone?
- » How much experience does the psychologist have in dealing with issues similar to yours?
- » What is the psychologist's approach to care?
- » Can the psychologist accommodate your schedule for therapy? Turn to the Clients' Bill of Rights on page 6 for other topics you may want to cover when interviewing a psychologist.



How to Prepare for Your First Appointment

The basis of all good psychotherapy is trust. Ideally, the psychologist you choose to work with will listen to and discuss your thoughts and feelings with you, so you can understand your emotions more fully. In the process of beginning a therapeutic relationship, it is important that you feel comfortable with your psychologist. This will allow you to build a solid, trusting relationship as you meet your challenges head-on. As you consider working with a psychologist, think ahead of time about what helps you to feel safe emotionally. Use those ideas as a guide for yourself, particularly when you make contact with the psychologist during the first session. Both during and after the initial contact, ask yourself if you would feel safe in sharing the more personal details of your life and areas where you might be struggling. If the answer is yes, that's a good thing. If the answer is no, that also offers important information, and may indicate the need to continue with your search. A good fit between client and psychologist is a crucial element in what makes therapy successful.

If you are seeing a psychologist for testing, they will let you know how to prepare for the appointment, including any limits to confidentiality relative to the type of evaluation.

What to Expect During an Individual or Group Therapy Session

Individual Therapy

During the first session, the psychologist may use information you have provided on an intake form to learn about your present-day challenges, any specific symptoms you may be experiencing, and any history of difficulty in the past. Additionally, the psychologist will inquire about your personal, family, social, developmental,

medical, and emotional history and relationships during the clinical interview. This information gained from the intake forms and the initial interview will aid the psychologist in learning more about you, better understanding the context in which some of these difficulties emerged, and ultimately determining which strategies may be most helpful to you.

Once the psychologist has sufficient information, and you feel you have conveyed your specific concerns sufficiently, you will work together (collaboratively) to determine your goals for care, and also develop a treatment plan specifically tailored to your needs. Some examples of treatment goals include a reduction in symptoms of depression or anxiety, reducing or stopping substance abuse, improving assertiveness skills, navigating grief, healing from trauma and trauma-related symptoms, or having healthy interpersonal relationships. However, it is important to note that the goals you establish at the beginning of treatment may change and evolve during the course of your care. If this occurs, feel free to share these goals with your psychologist so that they can best assist you with reaching them.

Group Therapy

A psychologist may refer a client to group therapy for a variety of reasons. For instance, there may be groups that support your particular needs (e.g., a depression group, a trauma survivor's group, an anxiety group). Additionally, there are also psychoeducational groups (e.g., couples communication groups, social skills groups, coping skills groups) that teach skills for navigating difficulties. Lastly, it can also be important to access healing within a community setting; therefore, your psychologist may recommend group therapy to bolster such healing.

Participating in group therapy has multiple benefits. Perhaps one of the most helpful and potentially healing aspects of this type of care is the understanding that you are not alone in whatever challenges you may be facing. Awareness of this kind may reduce

feelings of isolation in your lived experience. Group therapy fosters a sense of mutual understanding based on shared life experience, which ultimately allows a safe space for others to be supportive toward you and for you to lend your support to others. This reciprocity can provide personal growth and therapeutic value for you, in addition to any insights you might gain from the psychologist leading the group.

Similarly to individual therapy, you can also establish treatment goals for group therapy. One advantage of group therapy is that you are able to receive real-time, in-the-moment feedback from other group members as well as the psychologist about what they notice, which can help illuminate where you are in relation to your goals. This information can be useful as you reflect on your journey toward wellness.



What to Expect During Psychological Testing

Psychological testing may be comprised of a single session or a series of sessions depending on the type of testing required. There is usually a referral from a current provider or a self-referral about a particular concern or to find out about one's abilities and current functioning. Prior to the testing appointment, there may be questionnaires or background information that will be gathered

regarding the referral question. Assessments may involve gathering information from the individual's family members or other professionals (e.g., treating psychologist, physicians, teachers) with the individual or a legal guardian's signed release of information.

Assessments usually have an interview component wherein the assessor asks additional questions regarding one's history and current functioning. Although some of the questions may be difficult to answer, it is best to be as truthful and as accurate as possible. Some assessments may involve participating in different tasks with varying degrees of difficulty and the individual will be asked to just do their best. Feedback about the assessment may be provided at the end of the session or at a later time. A written report is provided that details the assessment findings, which may include applicable diagnoses and recommendations,

Participating in a psychological assessment can be very informative. The findings from an evaluation are a snapshot of one's current functioning, and it can help establish a baseline. It can help direct a proper course of intervention or treatment. Assessments can also provide invaluable insight into one's strengths and growth areas.

What Psychologists Are NOT Supposed to Do

Psychologists should NEVER:

- » Engage in any type of sexual contact or sexual behavior, which includes communications and other physical contact, with a current patient, a relative or significant other of a current patient, or a former patient within two years after termination of therapy.
- » Disclose confidential information, except under certain conditions which your psychologist can explain to you.

- » Provide services outside of their areas of competence.
- » Abuse drugs or alcohol.
- » Commit fraud or other crimes, including overbilling your insurance, for example.
- » Falsely advertise.
- » Pay or accept compensation for referral of clients.
- » Act unprofessionally by focusing therapy on their own problems instead of those of the client.
- » Engage in multiple relationships, including but not limited to employing patients, socializing with patients, and dating a patient's friend, co-worker, relative, or significant other.

In most cases, psychologists should not prematurely end the treatment relationship without discussing options for continuity of care.

What to Do if the Psychologist is Unprofessional

- » Express your concerns with your psychologist and/or their supervisor, if applicable.
- » Submit a complaint to the Board of Psychology. Refer to **www.psychology.ca.gov** to submit a complaint.



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