



Requirements for a Career in Counseling

Do you want to enter a career that helps others? Learn about counselor schooling requirements and resume tips.



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- **Most counseling positions require a master's degree, but there are some exceptions.**
- **You'll need to complete a certain number of supervised counseling hours to receive your license.**
- **Your resume should include your degrees, licenses, and any measurable skills you've learned.**

Considering a career in counseling? If so, you'll be joining a growing field of national importance as more and more people seek mental health support. Counseling careers of all specialties are projected to have a strong job outlook in the next decade.

Read on to learn how to become a counselor, your specific education requirements, what to include on your resume, and more.

What Are Common Counseling Careers?

Whether you want to work with couples, children, or adults, there are many ways to [help people as a counselor](#). In fact, the [American Counseling Association](#) (ACA) lists 19 different specialties.

The path you decide depends on the support you'd like to offer and the clientele you'd like to help. For example, a [substance abuse counselor](#) offers support to people with addiction problems during recovery. A [guidance counselor](#) helps students succeed academically and professionally.

And mental health counselors work with adults dealing with a variety of challenges, from career problems to general anxiety. Another option is to work directly with families and couples.

No matter which [type of counselor](#) you'd like to become, you'll be providing an important service that gives people the social, emotional, and mental support they need.

Counselors vs. Therapists

The terms counselor and therapist are often used interchangeably which can cause confusion to those seeking a career in the mental health profession.

Overall, both terms refer to a profession that offers guidance and support to people in need. *But* there is a difference between the two.

On the other hand, a licensed [marriage and family therapist](#) is trained in psychotherapy and focuses on improving family relationships.

Which Degree Should You Get to Work in Counseling?

The [requirements to become a counselor](#) vary by state and specialty. Most counseling positions require graduate degrees with many hours of field experience.

Others, such as addiction or substance abuse counselors, may only require an associate or bachelor's degree for you to receive a license in some states.

Associate Degree

There are limited career options with only an [associate degree](#). But pursuing a two-year degree lets you become familiar with the counseling field to see if it's right for you.

With an associate degree, you might find an entry-level position at a school, mental health clinic, or private practice. Depending on your state, you might consider a career as a substance abuse or addiction counselor.

Either way, it's a good option if you want to gain experience and narrow down your specialty area.

An associate degree should take you two years to complete as a full-time student. Most counseling programs at this level are offered in community colleges.

According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#) (NCES), you can expect tuition and fees to cost an average of \$3,900 annually at a public 2-year college.

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Bachelor's Degree

Much like an associate degree, a bachelor's degree has limited career options. But you can find job opportunities in addiction counseling, if that's your specialty.

Plus, a [bachelor's degree in counseling](#) helps you become more specialized. You have internship opportunities, resume assistance, and the chance to [network with experts](#) in your field, too.

This degree can be completed in four years as a full-time student. And most colleges typically offer in-person and online options as well.

Keep in mind that costs between schools usually differ. A private college will cost more than a state college, for example. On average, the [NCES](#) reports that costs are \$14,900 per year for students living off-campus with family or \$26,000 per year on-campus.

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Obtaining your [master's degree in counseling](#) typically leads to more career options and higher earning potential.

Plus, the majority of states require a master's for you to receive licensure, including Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC), Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC), and more.

You also have the opportunity to explore a particular specialty in greater depth, such as in school counseling or mental health counseling. And you'll have a broader range of internship opportunities to gain direct experience in the field.

Your master's degree should take you two years with a full-time course load. But many programs allow students to take courses part-time, so you can complete it in four years.

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Doctoral degree

While a doctorate is not necessary to be a practicing counselor, many professionals pursue this degree to become researchers, educators, or clinical supervisors.

It's also the only way you can become a [licensed psychologist](#), giving you a significant advantage over others in your field.

A [doctoral degree](#) includes clinical internships and field experiences in order to prepare you for advanced counseling practices or careers that require extensive experience. It takes two to four years attending full-time to finish your degree, but most programs can accommodate a part-time schedule.

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Required Practicum/Internship

Successfully completing your master's program in counseling requires a certain number of practicum and internship hours.

This experience gives you the opportunity to apply what you've learned under supervision to clients within the community, specifically within your specialty area.

Hours required for practicum and internship vary based upon your specific academic program and specialty. But most master's programs follow the [Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs](#) (CAPREP) guidelines which require 100 hours of practicum and 600 hours of internships.

[During your practicum](#), you develop counseling skills and utilize your professional knowledge under supervision. The setting is more structured than an internship, but you get to work with clients, build your communication skills, and understand the level of professionalism needed for your specialty.

An [internship](#) closely resembles the specific type of counseling role you'll be pursuing. In addition to supervised counseling with clients, you'll keep clinical records, collaborate with professionals in your field, present case studies, and more.

Required Licenses and Certifications

But in order to become a licensed professional counselor, you must receive a [master's degree in counseling](#) from a program that follows the CACREP curriculum with 48-60 semester hours of graduate study.

You're also required to have post-degree counseling experience under supervision. This also varies by state, but ranges from 2-3 years of experience for a total of 2,000-3,000 hours.

Each state has a board that establishes the minimum education requirements and supervised experience for you to receive licensing. So it's important to know the requirements before applying.

There are several different types of licenses you can apply for such as:

- Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC)
- Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC)
- Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC)
- Licensed Professional Clinical Counselor of Mental Health (LPCC)
- Licensed Clinical Mental Health Counselor (LCMHC)
- Licensed Mental Health Practitioner (LMHP)

In addition, your state will require you to take a counseling exam, such as the National Counselor Examination to get your licensing.

What to Include in Your Counseling Resume

When you're preparing your [counseling resume](#), you'll want to list degrees, state licensure information, certifications, and trainings.

If you're new to counseling, put your education at the top of your resume. Or if you're experienced in your field, put it towards the bottom. And be sure to include your GPA if it's above a 3.0.

You'll also want to list any honors, awards, and professional affiliations or membership organizations you're part of, such as the ACA.

Take the time to reflect on your internships, practicum, and experience in your field to [enhance the soft skills](#) you listed on your resume. Focus on measurable results and outcomes of your current and former experiences.

Frequently Asked Questions About a Career in Counseling

Is counseling a good career choice?

Yes. A career in counseling is ideal if you want to help people get through difficult situations or circumstances. Plus, because there are a variety of specialties in this field, you can choose to focus on a setting that interests you.

For example, you can work with children, families, or couples. You can also work in schools, clinics, or start your own practice.

But you must be prepared to pursue higher education in order to be successful in your field. While there are some exceptions, most states require a master's degree for you to be a licensed counselor.

What field of counseling makes the most money?

School counselors have the highest salaries listed on the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) when compared to other types of counselors. As of 2021, the BLS reports that the median annual salary for a school counselor is [\\$60,510](#) per year.

While the BLS reports that substance abuse and mental health counselors have a lower median salary of [\\$48,520](#) per year, it has a stronger projected job outlook than school counselors.

How long does it take to become a counselor?

If you do not already have your bachelor's degree, the process to become a counselor can take about eight years because most specialties require a master's degree.

If you become a full-time student, your bachelor's degree should only take you four years and your master's degree two years. To obtain your license, you also need 2,000-3,000 hours of supervised

require your associate degree.

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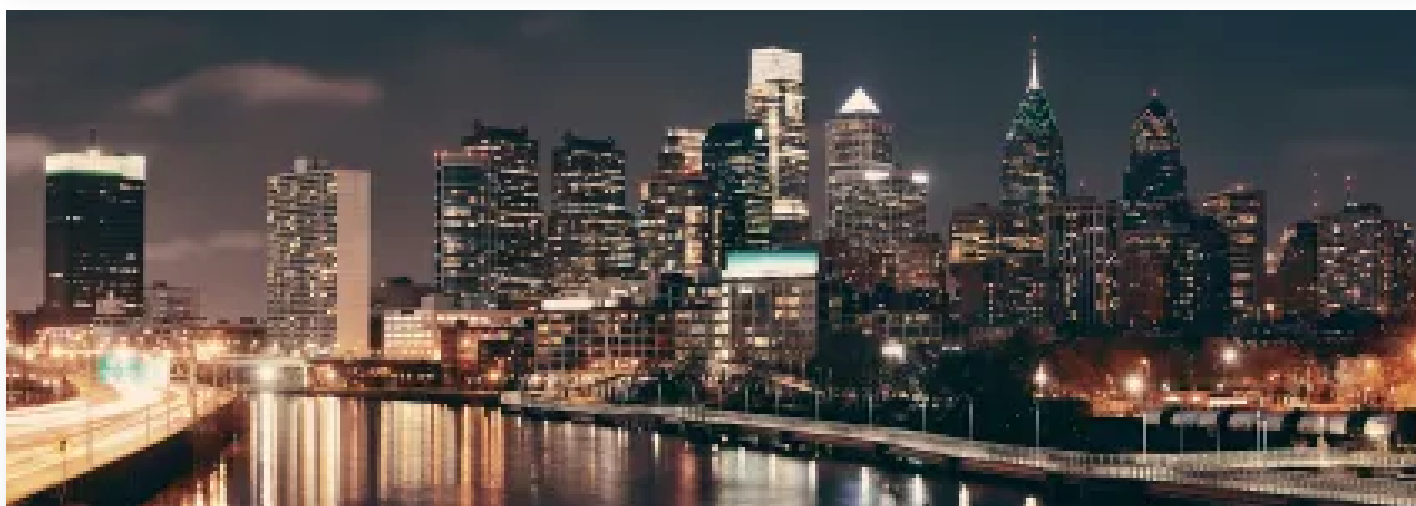


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