

Career Information for Mental Health Counselors

Career information and job search preparation including:

- Professional counseling and licensure information
- Professional development events, conferences, and career fairs
- Tips for job seekers
- Outlook and statistics in counseling and mental health jobs
- Resumes and interview tips

Mental Health Counseling Licensure

Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC) or Licensed Professional Counselors (LPC) are professional titles used in various states to differentiate a more extensive educational or professional experience level. Licensed counselors provide mental health and substance abuse care and are trained to work with individuals, families, and groups in treating mental, behavioral, and emotional problems and disorders. Licensed counselors make up a large percentage of the workforce employed in community mental health centers, agencies, and organizations.

State licensure requirements for professional counselors vary but typically include: a master's or doctoral degree in counseling including an internship and coursework along with completion of a minimum of 3,000 hours of post-master's degree supervised clinical experience, performed within two years, and periodic completion of continuing education credits/hours after obtaining licensure; passage of the National Counselor Examination (NCE) or a similar state-recognized exam; and adherence to a strict Code of Ethics and recognized standards of practice, as regulated by the state's counselor licensure board. To get started, go to the state board directory and click on the state in which you are seeking licensure. <https://www.nbcc.org/search/stateboarddirectory>.

The state of Maryland has its own unique requirements for those seeking licensure as a Mental Health Counselor. Maryland has two levels of licensure the **Licensed Graduate Professional Counselor** (LGPC) and the full level of licensure known as the **Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor**. More about Maryland's laws and regulations on licensure can be found at the Maryland Board of Professional Counselors website: <https://health.maryland.gov/bopc/Pages/profcounselor.aspx>

Online Career and Professional Development Resources

American Counseling Association

<http://www.counseling.org/>

American Mental Health Counselors Association

<http://www.amhca.org/>

American Psychological Association

<https://www.apa.org/careers/>

Maryland Psychological Association

<http://www.marylandpsychology.org/psychologists/about.cfm>

Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors for Maryland

<http://www.lcpcm.org/>

National Board for Certified Counselors

<https://www.nbcc.org/resources/nccs>

Johns Hopkins School of Public Health

<https://www.jhsph.edu/departments/mental-health/>

Maryland Department of Health & Mental Hygiene

<http://www.dhmh.state.md.us/>

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services (SAMHSA)

<http://www.hhs.gov/>

National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov>

Federal Government's Official Job Site

<http://www.usajobs.gov/>

Sheppard Pratt Health System

<http://www.sheppardpratt.org/>

Professional Development & Mental Health Related Events

American Counseling Association (ACA) Annual Conference & Expo, location varies: See link for info: <https://www.counseling.org/>

Maryland Counseling Association (MCA) Annual Conference: <https://www.mdcounseling.org/>

Johns Hopkins University Career Fairs, Homewood campus (Sept) <https://studentaffairs.jhu.edu/life-design/students/career-fairs/>
School of Public Health (March) <https://www.jhsph.edu/offices-and-services/career-services/events/career-fair/index.html>

Maryland Career Consortium Career Fair, annually, location varies <https://mcc.memberclicks.net/>

Sheppard Pratt Lecture Series: various mental health topics and professional development issues. Wednesdays from Sept thru June at Sheppard Pratt Conference Center in Baltimore: <http://www.sheppardpratt.org/education-training/wednesdays-sheppard-pratt/>

Tips for the Counseling and Mental Health Job Search

Reflect on and document your internship experience. Take time to think about what you have learned about yourself, your clients and your field, and how it impacts your philosophy of mental health and counseling. Do this on a regular basis to help you:

- Improve your counseling practice and elicit helpful feedback from your practicum supervisors.
- Prepare more thoroughly for interviews and career fairs.

Explore and prioritize opportunities. Consider how you see yourself working with clients.

Population: Are you interested in working with a specific client population?

Function: Do you want your role to primarily involve direct service and therapy or are you looking for some exposure to other roles such as research or program administration? Do you anticipate pursuing your license at some point?

Consider the many possible contexts to work in, including:

- *Social Services Agency (government or non-profit)*
- *Healthcare*
- *K-12 Schools*
- *Higher Education*
- *Community/Mental Health Facility*
- *Direct Service/Program-based Organization*
- *Corporate/private sector*
- *Private practice*

Build your network. Connecting with others in your profession can provide insight into what it's like to work at an organization as well as how to market yourself effectively in the job search. Becoming a mentee through the Johns Hopkins PeopleGrove platform and **Informational interviewing** is a great way to gather advice and build your network, though it's important to remember that the purpose of this type of meeting is to gather information and advice, not ask for a job or job interview. Here are some resources to get started:

- ✓ LinkedIn Groups
- ✓ Professional Associations are also a good resource for networking. For example: <http://www.counseling.org/>
<http://www.amhca.org/>

Become a Mentee

Johns Hopkins Mentoring Program offers current students and alumni the opportunity to connect with alumni mentors who can contribute to their professional and personal development. The program also offers the opportunity to network and develop contacts, access to industry information, and gain valuable insights from experienced and successful professionals.. Mentor/mentee pairings have the flexibility to meet as often as they would like. Meetings can be in-person, by phone, or virtually. For more info: <https://johnshopkins.peplegrove.com/hub/johnshopkins/program/johns-hopkins-mentoring-program-4/about>

Sample Questions for Informational Interviewing

How did you get into this career/job/occupation? What responsibilities and duties do you have in your work?

What qualifications do you look for in candidate for this job/occupational field? What do you look for in personal traits, values, and interests that are necessary or helpful to succeed and advance in this job/occupation/ organization? What skills, aptitudes, or personal qualifications do people need for this job/occupation (or to work in this organization)? What experience, education, training or background is required for this job?

Tips for the Counseling and Mental Health Job Search

Tweak your resume and cover letter: SOE Career Services can provide critiques during appointments or Rapid Resume Reviews which are offered during fall and spring semesters.

Attend Career Fairs. Career fairs allow you to meet a number of recruiters in one place so that you are able to offer resumes to and obtain contact information from employers of interest.

Attend professional development workshops: SOE Career Services offers workshops throughout the semesters on topics including resume/cover letter writing, applying to graduate schools/programs, and job fair preparation.

Attend networking events: SOE Career Services offers networking events throughout the year. From professional-related to social, online and in-person, networking events provide a great way to meet new people and make valuable contacts, professionally and personally – you never know who you may meet!

Prepare for Interviews. The key to successful interviewing is thorough and thoughtful presentation. Reflect on your internship as you prepare answers that illustrate concrete examples of your experience.

- Desire to work at a given organization and knowledge of its mission, values and services.
- Desire to work with a given population and understanding of issues faced by that population.
- Philosophy of clinical practice and approach to counseling/therapy Highlights/challenges from working with clients
- Strengths/weaknesses
- Best practices

Job Outlook and Statistics for Counselors and Careers in Mental Health

According to the [Occupational Outlook](#) Mental Health Counselors have received a *Bright Outlook* seal as an occupation that is expected to grow rapidly in the next several years (2018), with large numbers of job openings. Occupational Outlook report:

- this area is projected to grow much faster than average (employment increase of 22% or more) over the period 2018-2028.
- Is listed as a *New & Emerging* occupation in a high growth industry
- Demand for substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors is expected to increase as states seek treatment and counseling services for drug offenders rather than jail time.
- there will be a continued need for counselors to work with military veterans to provide them the appropriate mental health or substance abuse counseling care.
- Job prospects are expected to be very good for mental health counselors, particularly in rural areas or other communities that are underserved by mental health practitioners.

Salary Information

The median annual wage for mental health counselors was \$44,630 (May 2018). The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$28,240, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$72,990.

Government	\$51,690
Hospitals; state, local, and private	48,310
Individual and family services	44,120
Outpatient mental health and substance abuse centers	43,120
Residential mental health and substance abuse facilities	38,190

2018 National salary average (starting): \$23.00/hr. or \$48,500 annual. Md salary average: \$43,000 (median) - \$73,000 (high)

Phone Interview Preparation and Tips

The phone interview helps employers select qualified candidates. Being prepared to answer the most common phone interview questions is crucial for securing the in-person interview, so you can be offered the job. Your strategy is to provide facts that support your resume, with some context about your performance.

The following tips may help increase your chances of landing an in-person interview:

- **Prepare:** have a copy of your resume in front of you, also have the following information on-hand for the phone interview:
 - the job description or listing
 - research on the organization – visit their website
 - a list of questions you may have about the job – shows interest
- **First impressions:** are formed via the phone interview - always answer calls with enthusiasm in your voice, stating your first name. For example: “Hello, this is Jane.”
- **Smile:** your interviewer might not be able to see you, but a smile can actually be conveyed through the phone and make you sound more relaxed and enthusiastic.
- **Stand up:** walk around the room - this may help you relax but it is also a good technique to make **your voice clearer and louder.**
- **Be Professional:** Make every effort to sound professional and not personal as this call is not to establish a rapport – that happens during the in-person interview.
- **Listen:** Don’t interrupt while the interviewer is asking you questions or giving an explanation– let the caller do most of the talking without interruptions while you focus on listening so that you can respond accordingly.
- **Just the facts:** use numbers and facts to be effective – for example, state the amount of clients you were responsible for.
- **Airtime:** avoid the simple yes or no answer – silence during a phone conversation is dead airtime.
- **Rephrasing:** use the technique of restating or rephrasing the question – it tells the caller that you listened carefully and it also gives you time to think about your answer without pausing too long.
- **Compensation:** salary or benefit inquiries should come at the end of the interviewing cycle, never at the phone interview stage. If you are asked about your desired salary range, you can truthfully say you don't know enough about the job yet to state a specific figure.
- **Closing:** At the end of the interview, re-affirm your qualifications, express your interest in the job and the organization and tell them that you would appreciate the opportunity to meet with them in person to further discuss the position and why you are an excellent fit.

Potential Interview Questions

Potential Interview Questions to study and practice answering for potential interview questions.

- Why have you selected a career in counseling?
- How is your previous experience applicable to the work we do here?
- Have you had the experience of working with people of a race or sexual orientation different from yours? (be able to articulate how culture impacts our work re: abuse/neglect/prevention/ intervention etc.)
- What do you hope to accomplish as a counselor?
- What do you judge to be your major successes or accomplishments in your fieldwork? How did you achieve these?
- What major disappointments/failures have you had in fieldwork?
- Knowing what you know now, is there something you would do differently in the management of one of your fieldwork cases?
- What kind of evaluation process do you use to recommend a treatment plan? Who is involved in that planning?
- What are the measurable criteria you use to assess how well treatment is working? Can you give me a few examples?
- What psychotherapeutic approaches and tools do you use?
- How do you decide which approach is best for the patient? Do you ever use more than one approach? When?
- How do you involve key family members or friends?
- How do you assess progress?

Potential Interview Questions

Assessment of Skills/Technique

- Give me an example of how you are sensitive and intuitive as a counselor.
- Discuss your active listening experience and skills. Are you able to engage clients?
- How do you describe your personal boundaries?
- What kinds of things go into a psychological assessment?
- Do you believe in short term or long-term treatment?
- How do you handle termination?
- Think of a client you have liked/disliked and tell me how you dealt with the counter transference issues.

Personality/Working Style/Other

- This position requires a lot of independent thinking and initiative. There is minimal supervision. Could you handle that?
- Would you rather draw up plans and design a program or be responsible for implementing a program? Why?
- How would your weaknesses interfere with your ability to do this job?
- What kinds of problems do you like to handle? Can you give me an example.
- What do you think is going to happen in the field in the next five years?
- Are you a member of any professional organizations?
- Do you feel you can be objective in counseling someone with values that are not aligned with your personal beliefs?

May/May Not Apply Depending on Position Type

- What techniques do you use in crisis intervention work?
- How would you handle a psychotic outburst in the clinic waiting room?
- In terms of family therapy, what is your theoretical orientation?
- What are the risk assessment/signs of abuse/neglect?

Counselor Resumes

What do organizations want to see in your resume?

- **Summary Statement:** A resume summary statement (or often called a profile statement) is a brief list of the highlights of your qualifications and experiences giving the reader at a glance, a synopsis of your professional qualifications.
- **Credentials:** If licensure is required, list those credentials next to your name (i.e. M.S., LCPC, LGPC, NCC, etc.) or under your education as subtitles such as 'Certifications and Licenses' or 'Certification' etc.
- **Preferred or recommended qualifications:** skills that may not be required but preferred for the job – if you have any preferred qualifications such as computer skills, make sure you include them too.
- **Preferred experience:** This usually means that the potential employer is open to hearing from you if you do not have the qualities they prefer but perhaps related experience or other employment.

Brief Resume versus Expanded Resume:

One-page resume: Some employers prefer a brief resume outlining your experience and education with degrees earned, dates of employment with various employers, primary accomplishments, and other experience pertaining to the specific position. Make sure your brief resume is one page.

Expanded resume: Some employers prefer an expanded resume with complete job descriptions, accomplishments and duties. Positions in Higher Education prefer this type of resume

What to Include and Exclude:

Unless it is your first job out of school, or a paid internship, don't include your grade point average. Employers want to know you are a bright, hard-working, creative, resourceful individual who will get along with the staff. Grades are not as important as abilities such as interpersonal skills and listing a GPA can make you appear somewhat inexperienced or new to the working world.

Be careful if you describe your preferable school of thought in counseling. It is possible you are a proponent of Cognitive/Behavioral techniques, and the person interviewing you is Psychodynamic. Don't let a preference exclude you from a job that may provide you with a new or different perspective or one from which you can learn and grow.

Resume Tips

- Use bullets to list job responsibilities and accomplishments. To find a list of common counselor responsibilities/duties go to ONET: <https://www.onetonline.org/link/summary/21-1014.00>
- Use present tense for current job and past tense for all past jobs.
- Don't use "I" in your bullet points – list as "Responsible for" instead of "I am responsible for."
- Don't use too many bullets for each job (6-8 max).
- Keep it uniform - all bullets should be consistent, if capping the first word, do so throughout. If using periods, use throughout.
- Bullets are more concise and easier to read for employers who skim.
- Proofread for any errors, typos, inconsistency.

Sample Summary Statement & Bullet Points

For internship in Counseling:

Graduate student counselor seeking internship experience in a clinical setting. Related background includes working with individuals in a variety of capacities. Ability to maintain discretion and sound judgment. Effective communicator with strong organizational and collaboration skills. Related coursework includes:

For newly graduate in counseling: *Licensed Graduate Professional Counselor in training with practicum/internship experience in counseling adolescents from diverse backgrounds seeking a counseling (or entry level counselor) position to build on my related skills. Related coursework includes:*

For counselor with some experience: *Licensed Certified Professional Counselor (LCPC) with over five years of experience serving children and adults in individual, group and family therapy settings including case management, life skills training, job readiness, and community resource coordination. Qualifications include:*

- Conducting intakes, assessments, and treatment service plans
- Collecting information about clients through interviews, observations, and tests.
- Conferring with clients to discuss their options and goals.
- Counseling individuals, groups, adolescents, children, families, regarding issues including mental health, unemployment, poverty, substance abuse, physical abuse, rehabilitation, social adjustment, relationships, health issues, etc.
- Ability to evaluate clients, identify and encourage individuals to develop and use skills and strategies for confronting their problems in a constructive manner.
- Strong interpersonal communication ability to develop a confidential and trusting environment with clients.

Cover Letters

Why a cover letter?

- To serve as an introduction of who you are, what you have to offer, and why you are contacting them.
- To make an important first impression – potential employers can use the cover letter to assess your communication ability, and interest in the job.
- To showcase specific or relevant education, skills and experience.
- To discuss why you are an ideal match for the position, what you know about them and why you are a good fit for the organization.
- To convey your enthusiasm, interest in the job, helping you to stand out among other candidates – more personable
- To be more specific about your career objectives or goals.

Content

- 1st Paragraph *The Introduction:* why you are contacting them, relevant education or experience, a sentence about them - why you want to work there.
- 2nd Paragraph *The Body:* your relevant professional background, skills, experience and achievements that best qualify you for the job.
- 3rd Paragraph *The sell:* why you would be an ideal match for the organization and what you can do for them.
- Closing paragraph: information about attachments "attached is my resume for your review" and follow up information, "I will contact you within a week to follow up on the receipt of my resume." Thank them for their time, sign and print name.

Sample cover letter for internship

Date

Contact name, title (if available)
Organization
Street
City, State, Zip

Dear Mr. Doe,

Start with why you are contacting them: I am interested in applying for the position (or an internship) at **(name of organization)**. I recently graduated from (or am currently a graduate student in) the Clinical Mental Health Counseling master's degree program at Johns Hopkins University. **Add undergrad education along with any related training and certification info.** I hold a bachelor's of _____ from

In this paragraph, discuss your relevant experience: My related experience includes working with (populations) in a (school/clinical) setting. ***Add your related skills and background here. Include a sentence or two about the organization and why you want to work there – for example, your counseling objectives, approach, style, values, etc. are aligned with their mission or you are interested in working with that particular population.***

In this paragraph, discuss why you want to be an intern or do practicum work with the organization, what you can contribute to the job (skills, knowledge) and a sentence or two about why you are a strong candidate and a good match for the position or organization. I am passionate about working with ***(preschoolers/children/youths/teens/students, adults/older adults/veterans, etc.)*** and am hoping/eager/excited to learn and/or gain more experience/skills as a counselor while contributing to the organization. Add any other relevant information and/or experience/skills in relation to the job.

Closing paragraph: Attached is a copy of my resume which details my background and related experience. I will contact you within a week to follow up on the receipt of my resume (or discuss opportunities as an intern) at (name of organization). Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Signature

(print first and last name)

JANE A. SMITH

30 Street, Baltimore, MD 21212 Phone 123-456-7891 email: emailaddress@gmail.com

SUMMARY

Licensed Graduate Professional Counselor (LGPC) experienced in working with children and adolescents in individual and group therapy includes case management and community resource coordination seeking a counseling position serving youth and young adults. Strong interpersonal skills with demonstrated ability to inspire, motivate and empower through effective therapeutic interventions.

EDUCATION

Master of Science in Mental Health Counseling, Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, MD 2018

Related coursework: *Couple and Family Therapy, Legal and Ethical Issues of Mental Health Counseling, Diversity and Social Justice in Counseling, Appraisal and Testing for Counselors*

Bachelor of Science in Psychology, Temple University, Philadelphia, PA 2010

RELATED EXPERIENCE

Counselor, Harford Mental Health Center; Harford CT 2018 - present

- Manage daily operations of adult psychiatric day care program for geriatric population
- Coordinate all onsite and off-site activities including transporting clients
- Conduct wellness recovery groups for psychiatric rehabilitation
- Counsel, monitor and provide feedback to clients to achieve rehabilitation goals

Counselor Intern, Family Crisis Center, Baltimore, MD 2017-2018

- Assisted with daily operations of shelter
- Assisted residents in intake, treatment planning and discharge procedures
- Provided individual, group and family intervention services
- Facilitated job skills training

Life Skills Group Facilitator, Baltimore County Public Schools; Baltimore MD 2011-2015

- Trained homeless parents of children with budgeting, job preparation and time management skills • Implemented skills for anger management with clients

Intern Counselor, Belmont Behavioral Hospital, Philadelphia PA 2009 - 2010

- Counseled children and adolescents with disruptive behaviors
- Engaged children in behavioral, play and sand-tray therapy
- Facilitated grief and loss group.
- Conducted individual, group and family intervention session

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT/TRAINING

Major Depression & Bipolar Disorder in Children, Teens, & Adults Seminar, *Maryland Counseling Association*, Baltimore MD
Strengthening Families Program, Group Leader Training Program, *Baltimore County Health Department*, Baltimore MD
Child Centered Play Therapy Workshop, *National Institute of Family Enhancement*, Philadelphia PA
Mindfulness Meditation Training, *Center for Meditation*, Philadelphia PA

PROFESSIONAL AFFILIATIONS

Chi Sigma Iota Counseling Honor Society, Lambda Chapter, Johns Hopkins University
American Counseling Association (ACA), Maryland Chapter
Maryland Counseling Association (MCA)