

Behavioral and Mental Health Services

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There are many different types of behavioral and mental health professionals, and finding a good fit for what your child or family needs can feel overwhelming. Here is an overview of different types of clinicians, types of therapy and interventions, questions to ask as you search, and things to know about therapy.

Types of clinicians

Licensed clinical social workers (LCSWs/LMSWs) are master's-degreed clinicians. They can provide therapy and make diagnoses, but they cannot prescribe medication.

Licensed professional counselors (LPCs/LAPCs) are master's-degreed clinicians. They can provide therapy and make diagnoses, but they cannot prescribe medication.

Licensed marriage and family therapists (LMFTs/LAMFTs) are master's-degreed clinicians. They can provide therapy and make diagnoses, but they cannot prescribe medication.

Psychologists have a doctoral degree (PhD or PsyD) in psychology. They can provide therapy and diagnostic testing to measure cognitive abilities and personality characteristics, but they cannot prescribe medication. Neuropsychology is a subspecialty of psychology that assesses the relationship between the brain and behavior, and it is used to diagnose brain disorders.

Board-certified behavior analysts® (BCBAs) are independent clinicians with graduate-level training in applied behavior analysis (ABA).

Psychiatric nurse practitioners (PMHCNS-BC/PMHNP-BC) have a master's degree or a doctorate in nursing, with a specialty in psychiatry. They can provide evaluations and make diagnoses. They can also prescribe and manage medication for behavioral and mental health conditions.

Psychiatrists are medical doctors (MDs) who provide evaluations and make diagnoses. They can also prescribe and manage medication for behavioral and mental health conditions.

School-based supports, evaluations and services may be available as well. Speak with your child's school counselor to find out more.

Types of therapy

There are many different types of therapy and interventions. Below are some interventions that are proven to be effective based on research:

- **Play therapy** helps children freely explore, express and work through thoughts, feelings and experiences using play.
- **Art therapy** helps children explore, express and work through thoughts, feelings and experiences using art.
- **Family therapy** helps families function in more positive and constructive ways.
- **Cognitive-behavioral therapy** (CBT) teaches skills to change behavior and to increase awareness about inaccurate, negative or unhelpful thinking patterns and how to replace them with more realistic thoughts.
- **Trauma-focused cognitive behavioral therapy** (TF-CBT) helps children explore, express and work through thoughts, experiences and feelings related to traumatic events.
- **Dialectical behavior therapy** (DBT) is designed to teach skills to help manage feelings, tolerate emotional discomfort and improve relationships.
- **Applied behavior analysis** (ABA) uses treatment approaches to analyze and change behavior. ABA is shown to be effective in a wide variety of areas, but it is best known as a treatment approach for individuals with intellectual disabilities and autism.

Questions to ask when searching for behavioral and mental health services

There are many types of behavioral and mental health clinicians and services. Services vary depending on need, method of payment and clinician.

- **What types of services do you provide?**
- **What are your payment options?**
 - Do you accept insurance?
If so, which plans do you accept?
 - Can I pay out of pocket?
 - Do you offer a reduced rate option?
- **What type of clients do you typically see?**
- **How would you describe your treatment style?**
- **When do you offer appointments? What are the length and frequency of sessions?**
- **What should we expect during the first appointment?**
- **What is your procedure for confidentiality? Will you share information with me about my child or adolescent as part of the treatment process?**

Things to know about therapy

- ✓ Going to therapy does not always mean that you will receive a diagnosis or medication.
- ✓ Be patient. Change takes time. The length and frequency of treatment will vary based on each individual.
- ✓ Therapists are not one size fits all! If you don't feel like a clinician is right for your child or family, before or after meeting them, you can keep looking until you find the right fit.
- ✓ It's OK to ask questions! If you are unsure or uncomfortable about anything, just ask.
- ✓ In order for therapy to be successful, it needs to be a safe space for everyone. It is important that both you and your child have a space to share. Allow your child a chance to share what they think and feel, even if you don't agree.
- ✓ When working with children, caregivers need to be involved, which means participating in appointments and working on skills with the child in between sessions.

For more coping skill ideas, visit [Strong4Life.com/coping](https://www.strong4life.com/coping)