

What is a Psychologist?

A psychologist studies how we think, feel and behave from a scientific viewpoint and applies this knowledge to help people understand, explain and change their behaviour.

Where Do Psychologists Work?

Some psychologists work primarily as researchers and faculty at universities and at governmental and non-governmental organizations. Others work primarily as practitioners in hospitals, schools, clinics, correctional facilities, employee assistance programs and private offices. Many psychologists are active in both research and practice.

What Do Psychologists Do?

Psychologists engage in research, practice and teaching across a wide range of topics having to do with how people think, feel and behave. Their work can involve individuals, groups, families and as well as larger organizations in government and industry. Some psychologists focus their research on animals rather than people. Here are some of the kinds of topics towards which psychologists focus their research and practice:

- mental health problems such as depression, anxiety, phobias, etc.;
- neurological, genetic, psychological and social determinants of behaviour;
- brain injury, degenerative brain diseases;
- the perception and management of pain;
- psychological factors and problems associated with physical conditions and disease (e.g. diabetes, heart disease, stroke);
- psychological factors and management of terminal illnesses;
- cognitive functions such as learning, memory, problem solving, intellectual ability and performance;
- developmental and behavioural abilities and problems across the lifespan;
- criminal behaviour, crime prevention, services for victims and perpetrators of criminal activity;
- addictions and substance use and abuse (e.g. smoking, alcohol);
- stress, anger and other aspects of lifestyle management;
- court consultations addressing the impact and role of psychological and cognitive factors in accidents and injury, parental capacity, and competence to manage one's personal affairs;
- the application of psychological factors and issues to work such as motivation, leadership, productivity, marketing, healthy workplaces, ergonomics;
- marital and family relationships and problems;

- psychological factors necessary to maintaining wellness and preventing disease;
- social and cultural behaviour and attitudes, the relationship between the individual and the many groups of which he or she is part (e.g. work, family, society); and
- the role and impact of psychological factors on performance at work, recreation and sport.

What is the Difference between a Psychologist and a Psychiatrist?

In Canada, the professionals who most commonly treat people with mental health problems are psychologists and psychiatrists. A psychologist holds a master's and/or doctoral degree in psychology that involves from 6 to 10 years of university study of how people think, feel and behave. Psychologists who hold doctoral degrees, can use the title 'Dr.'. Psychologists who practice (and hence those who are licensed) typically will have completed their graduate university training in clinical psychology, counseling psychology, clinical neuropsychology or educational/school psychology.

Although psychologists are licensed generally and not in specific specialty areas, they are required to declare their areas of competency to the regulatory body and required to practice within the bounds of their competence. It is important that, for example, a psychologist practicing neuropsychology (assessing and treating problems in thinking or brain function that might occur after an accident or stroke for example) has been trained in the area of neuropsychology.

A psychologist working with children should have been trained in the area of child psychology and so on. Typically, the psychologist will have received this training while in graduate school where he or she will have chosen the courses and training experiences to prepare for working within a particular specialty area. Sometimes, psychologists pursue specialized training after graduation by completing a post-doctoral fellowship for example.

A practicing psychologist is trained to assess and diagnose problems in thinking, feeling and behaviour as well to help people overcome or manage these problems. A psychologist is uniquely trained to use psychological tests to help with assessment and diagnosis. Psychologists help people to overcome or manage their problems using a variety of treatments or psychotherapies.

Psychiatrists are medical doctors who go on to specialize in mental health and mental disorders. Psychiatrists often use medication to help their clients manage their mental disorders and there are some disorders for which medications are very necessary (schizophrenia and some depressions for examples). Some psychiatrists also do psychotherapy much like psychologists do. For more information on the study and practice of psychiatry, please visit the website of the Canadian Psychiatric Association at <http://www.cpa-apc.org>.

Sometimes a client might consult his or her family physician about medication while seeing a psychologist for psychotherapy. Some family physicians have an interest and training in treating psychological problems.