

# Top 6 Reasons to Join a Professional Association

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Yes, I know. Dues are expensive. You can't see yourself spending the time or money to go to national conferences. You don't have time to read the journals. So why join a professional association?

Because your professional association is your professional "home." It's the place where people in the same field will come to know you, support you, nurture your growth and development as a therapist and even protect your livelihood in important ways. Especially for those of us in private practice, our professional associations mitigate the potential isolation and loneliness of our work. There's nothing quite like sharing in the excitement of learning about new understandings and techniques with others who share the challenges and the joys of therapeutic work. There's nothing quite as supportive as a group of people who have "been there and done that" about difficult cases, about the business of our business and about the governmental and insurance industry policies that at times buffet us.



There are associations for every profession of therapists. Research your options carefully. Each one has a mission statement. Each one draws people with a specific shared focus. You want to find an organization that is so helpful to you that you want to be actively involved.

The following list is not all-inclusive but is intended to give you an idea of the scope of choices. Professional associations are generally organized primarily by license, by theoretical approach or by the population served.

## By License

- **APA:** American Psychological Association
- **APA:** American Psychiatric Association
- **NASW:** National Association of Social Workers
- **ACA:** American Counseling Association
- **AAMHCA:** American Mental Health Counselors Association

## By Approach

- **IAAP:** International Association for Analytical Psychology (Jungian)
- **APsaA** The American Psychoanalytic Association
- **NASAP:** North American Society of Adlerian Psychology
- **ABCT:** Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies
- **AHP:** Association for Humanistic Psychology
- **ASGPP:** American Society of Group Psychotherapy and Psychodrama
- **APBA:** Association of Professional Behavior Analysts

## By Population Served

- **AAMFT:** American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists
- **NADD:** National Association for the Dually Diagnosed
- **ARCA:** American Rehabilitation Counseling Association
- **NAADAC:** National Association for Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Counselors
- **APT:** Association for Play Therapy

In addition, there are state, national, and international chapters for most of them. State chapters give members the opportunity to focus on issues that are specific to their geographical area and to connect with local colleagues. International organizations provide opportunities to connect with colleagues around the world and to expand our thinking to global issues.

During my student years, I belonged to five different organizations! At that time, I was exploring different career possibilities and student rates made it possible to afford multiple memberships. Each association's conferences provided training in areas in which I wanted to know more. Once I narrowed my focus, I chose the two that are most supportive of my career path but I'm glad I took advantage of student rates to explore a number of organizations before making my final choice.

## 6 Benefits to Joining

**1. Collegueship:** Our associations are the primary way that people do face-time networking with people who share our professional interests. Although online options are making it possible to network with people all over the world, there is still much to be said for periodically meeting people up close and personal and for creating professional friendships. People who know and like each other are more apt to contact each other about shared research interests, to notify each other about employment opportunities and to give each other advice and support. Sometimes people become mentors or mentees as they get to know each other better. Getting together at yearly conferences makes attending all the more comfortable and exciting.

**2. Education:** We're in a rapidly changing field. It can take years for good research to make it into print. Workshops and conferences sponsored by your professional organization give you the opportunity to be on the cutting edge. You can stay up to date and knowledgeable about new trends and treatments in the field and current about further developments or concerns about treatment approaches you thought you knew.

**3. Information:** Association journals, bulletins and newsletters, websites and list-serves are often the first place that new developments in the field are published. Many associations use their media to alert their members to more than research. Articles and news items also inform us about changes in governmental policies, insurance issues and legal and ethical issues that impact our practice.

**4. Career Development:** Attending members-only conferences enhances your resume. Even listing your membership tells prospective employers that you are active in your career. Presenting a poster or workshop gives you experience in sharing your work and wins you further credentials as a speaker or trainer if that is one of your career goals. Further, associations often have listings of job opportunities that are only available to members.

**5. Financial Benefits:** Large organizations are able to negotiate reduced rates for such services as malpractice insurance, life insurance, dental and vision insurance, identity theft protection, even auto insurance. Some organizations offer member rates for billing services, office supplies and legal services. Some are able to offer travel opportunities, car rentals and hotel accommodations at deeply discounted rates.

**6. Political Influence:** Professional organizations give you a voice. Participating in committees and letting members of the Board know where you stand helps the association understand the wishes of its members. The Board can then give input (and sometimes even pressure) to government agencies about proposed policies and changes that would impact their members and/or the people they serve. Large organizations can put money and professional resources behind their positions. Adding yourself to the membership adds to the power that is in numbers.

Joining a professional association is part of taking ourselves seriously as professionals. Membership enriches our practice and provides on-going information about the ever-changing landscape of mental health treatment. Best of all, taking advantage of networking opportunities helps us develop a lifelong support system with people who share our passion and commitment to our field.