

LCSW vs. LPC or LMHC

The Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW) seems on the surface to be functionally very similar to the Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) or Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC), and while this is true there are also some important differences both in terms of schooling required, as well as professional outlook and methods employed. This article will provide an in-depth look into the similarities as well as differences between LCSW's and LPC's or LMHC's.

Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) & Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC)

- Usually requires a minimum of a Master's degree in Counseling along with post graduate supervised experience.
- LPC's and LMHC's work in a collaborative approach with the patient to determine the best way for the counseling sessions to provide preferred outcomes.
- LPC's and LMHC's require advanced degrees and training to achieve licensure to operate.
- Refers only to those licensed by a state board to provide professional counseling based mental therapy.
- Must adhere to high standards regarding ethics and confidentiality as provided by the state board. Usually involves signing an ethics pledge or oath.
- Can be involved in direct therapy with patients in private practice.
- LPC's and LMHC's have access to a much broader field of potential models and methods for mental health therapies.
- LPC's and LMHC's provide an approach that is highly attuned to the individual and especially their decision making process to achieve client goals and objectives.

The Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) or Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) are two different titles for essentially the same occupation in the mental health field, both of which require a significant degree of education as well as training. These are protected titles and carry with it a substantially different definition and level of professional quality from the term counselor which could include a great many unrelated professions. In fact the term counselor is the equivalent of advisor and could encompass such diverse groups as clergy and other spiritual advisors and even financial advisors. While there are some highly gifted people who can help people in significant ways who may call themselves counselors and even possess a high degree of professionalism, ethical standards and confidentiality, the lack of licensing creates fewer barriers to entry for the less scrupulous. This is solved through the process by which one becomes a Licensed Professional Counselor or Licensed Mental Health Counselor, the titles of which vary depending upon the state you live in.

The LPC and LMHC offer a method of mental health counseling that is very individually based and tends to rely on a more collaborative approach than other methods of mental health counseling and often has a more flexible outlook on methodologies than social work or psychology. Due to this, LPC's and LMHC's are often able to make use of more novel approaches and also develop therapies that they find to be effective as long as this falls within the ethics guidelines as well as the legal standards for the counseling profession in the state in which one practices. It is this flexibility in methods and practice that many find appealing when weighing their options between professional counseling and other occupations in mental health therapy.

The primary method that is employed by both LPC's and LMHC's is working with the client to first establish rapport and understanding of the client's situation and then to develop a series of interventions that involve concrete ways in which problems in the client's life can be resolved usually through refining and changing the client's decision making process. In most cases LPC's and LMHC's work with the client on a primarily internal and individual level ensuring the client's focus is on what they can do within their life to change things. This is a substantial difference from social work wherein an analysis of the client's economic and societal situation, as well as their current home environment, plays a substantial role in the therapy.

The Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)

- Usually requiring a minimum of a Master's degree in Social Work.
- Refers to those licensed by a state board to provide Social Work based mental therapy.
- Must adhere to high standards regarding ethics and confidentiality as provided by the state board. Usually involves signing an ethics pledge or oath.
- Can be involved in direct therapy with patients in private practice. Might be a leader or part of a team conducting research for a university or private enterprise.
- Uses researched based strengths based social work approach to treating clients.
- Can assess and make clinical evaluations of client's mental health and diagnose mental illness.
- Make judgments on the best course of treatments based upon current clinical research in the social work field.

The Licensed Clinical Social Worker, also known as the LCSW, is a branch of social work that specializes in mental health therapy in a counseling format. Becoming an LCSW requires a significant degree of training, including having earned a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree from a Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) accredited program. The requirements to attain the LCSW title varies depending on the state, but in most cases will

require an MSW as well as extensive post graduate supervised experience. As a final step, you will be required to pass an ASWB approved national clinical social work test. Click on your state's name next to the map here for state specific requirements

One of the primary defining characteristics of the Licensed Clinical Social Worker method of mental health therapy is that something called a strength-based approach to client counseling is employed. The strength-based approach requires that the LCSW works with the client to assess their own personal situation both in terms of their internal situation and also their external factors such as economic, societal, home and career in order to create an inventory of both strengths and perceived weaknesses or obstacles. In this way, social work represents a very holistic approach to mental health therapy that separates it from other disciplines.