

## What is the difference between a Counsellor, Therapist, Psychotherapist, Psychologist, Psychiatrist or Life Coach..?

**Certified, Licensed or Registered Counsellors** who are members of a College or Association with a Code of Ethics, may come to their occupation through significant educational training, including Diplomas, Masters or Doctorate degrees in Counselling, Education, Psychology, Social Work, Nursing, Theology or Occupational Health.

### **Psychotherapists**

Psychotherapy is a general term for counselling that supports a client to explore distress that is impacting their quality of life. The terms Counsellor, Therapist or Psychotherapist are often used interchangeably.

Psychotherapists may be attached to a number of different professional bodies, and it is important to identify the training, experience and ethical guidelines the Counsellor/ Psychotherapist is expected to follow through membership or registration of their Professional Association. Professional Associations could include:

Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association [link to <http://www.ccpa-accp.ca>]

British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy [link to <http://www.bacp.co.uk>]

Australian Counselling Association [<http://www.theaca.net.au/index.php>]  
Social Work (Canada) [<http://www.casw-acts.ca>]

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists [<http://www.caot.ca>]

Registered Psychiatric Nurse Regulators of Canada [<http://www.rpnc.ca>]

Psychotherapists may be less focused on “diagnosis” and “disorders” in mental health, and more interested in their client’s distress and how it is impacting their life.

Psychotherapists may work in private practice as well as in organisations including, governmental and non governmental agencies, hospitals, correctional facilities, and Employment Assistance Programmes (EAP).

### **Psychologists**

[www.cpa.ca](http://www.cpa.ca) note, “Psychology is a wide discipline which studies how we think, feel and behave from a scientific viewpoint and applies this knowledge to help people understand, explain and change their behaviour”.

Psychologists may work in a number of different areas, not just counselling: Clinical Psychologists (who are trained and registered to work in mental health) may work in hospitals, correctional settings, governmental and non-governmental agencies, schools and private practice. They may use psychological testing to help with assessment and diagnosis.

### **Psychiatrists**

[www.cpa-apc.org](http://www.cpa-apc.org) are medical doctors with additional training to allow them to “specialise in mental health and mental disorders”. Psychiatrists work with diagnosis using, for example, the DSM (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, published by the American Psychiatric Association) or the ICD (International and Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, published by the World Health Organization). They will often prescribe medication to help their clients manage their mental health. Psychiatrists may work in more formal medical settings and work with more severe mental health distress. Family doctors may refer a patient to a psychiatrist working in a hospital or wellness centre for further treatment or medication. Depending on your health service, treatment may be limited and involve being on a waiting list. Some people choose to see a counsellor/psychotherapist in private practice simultaneously to complement their wellness journey.

If you are interested in the history and controversy surrounding the DSM, Wikipedia provides a good summary:

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diagnostic\\_and\\_Statistical\\_Manual\\_of\\_Mental\\_Disorders](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Diagnostic_and_Statistical_Manual_of_Mental_Disorders)

### ***Social Workers***

<http://www.casw-acts.ca/en/what-social-work> identify their profession as “concerned with helping individuals, families, groups and communities to enhance their individual and collective well-being”. Their focus is to help people develop their skills and their ability to use their own resources and those of the community to resolve problems. Social work is concerned with individual and personal problems but also with broader social issues such as poverty, unemployment and domestic violence.

Social workers practice a variety of roles in a range of settings, including schools, hospitals, correctional centres, childrens’ aid societies, as well as in private practice.

Mental Health Nurses as well as Occupational Health professionals may also provide counselling in a medical setting, or in schools, government and non-governmental agencies and private practice.

Life Coaches unlike, Counsellors/Psychotherapists, do not focus on healing distress, conflict or pain individually or in relationships, although these issues may be discussed. Instead, they support personal and professional growth based on “self-initiated change in pursuit of specific actionable outcomes”. Coaching is future focused helping clients create actionable strategies for achieving specific goals in one's work or personal life. The emphases in a coaching relationship are on action, accountability, and follow through. Coaches can support you to find psychotherapeutic support if there are issues raised that are causing you significant distress or blocking you on the action and follow through you desire. Many people refer to themselves as Coaches, so it is

important to find out about the training and experience of the coach you are interested in working with. The International Coach Federation is one training organization for Coaches and has questions to ask a prospective Coach on it's webpage [link

<http://www.coachfederation.org/need/landing.cfm?ItemNumber=979&navItemNumber=568> ]