

Careers If You Like Problem Solving

James Roland



Career Exploration



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Clinical Psychologist

A Few Facts

Number of Jobs

166,600

Median Salary

\$77,030

Minimum Educational Requirements

Master's degree in psychology or a related field

Certification and Licensing

State-issued license to practice psychology is required

Personal Qualities

Empathy; patience; good listener; ability to see both immediate and long-term needs

Work Settings

Indoors in offices or clinical settings; may see clients in their workplaces

Future Job Outlook

14 percent growth through 2026

What Does a Clinical Psychologist Do?

Of all the careers for people who like to solve problems, a clinical psychologist is unique because the job is largely about helping others learn how to solve their own problems. These psychologists diagnose and treat people with mental disorders as well as individuals who are facing any type of distress. They do all this by observing people, interpreting their words and actions, and helping them learn strategies to better cope with the challenges in their lives. A clinical psychologist's job is to help clients think and act in ways that are healthier and that will help them reach certain goals. Clinical psychologists identify their clients' problems through interviews, tests, and observations of how they act and the words they choose when describing themselves and the challenges in their lives. They then share what they have learned and observed with their clients to come up with a treatment plan.

The list of issues that clinical psychologists encounter with their clients is seemingly endless. The types of conditions they treat include depression

and anxiety, learning difficulties, behavioral problems, and emotional challenges related to abuse, grieving, aging, and other life-changing circumstances. Clients often see clinical psychologists when they know something is wrong, but they can't quite explain or understand the problem. Others come to psychologists knowing their challenges but needing help in finding a solution. Once a psychological, behavioral, or emotional problem has been identified, the psychologist and client will come up with goals for treatment and then a program to achieve those goals. Sometimes a clinical psychologist will refer a client to a psychiatrist, who, as a medical doctor, is qualified to prescribe medications. Psychiatrists tend to see patients with a range of conditions that require medication, including bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and even attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder.

Ryan Howes, a clinical psychologist in California, explains that being a psychologist means joining clients on their journeys to overcome the problems and challenges in their lives. It's a role that good psychologists cherish and take quite seriously. "I essentially earn my living watching stories of strength and perseverance unfold before me," Howes adds. "I get to join them and help them along the way as we share the obstacles and successes together. I'm honored."¹⁹

A Typical Workday

Clinical psychologists often start out by reviewing the files of the people they will see that day, making notes of what might be covered during those sessions. One by one, clients will spend an hour or so talking with the psychologist. If it's the person's first session, the psychologist may ask a lot of questions about the individual's life and why he or she is seeking therapy. Clients who have been in therapy for a longer time will talk about what's been happening since the last appointment and how they have been applying some of the strategies learned in previous sessions.

Part of the workday may also include research into a problem facing one of their clients. Online resources and books can help,

A Rewarding Career

“There are a few reasons I love being a psychotherapist. First, I find it to be a singular honor and privilege to play a part in the stories of my clients. Also, I cannot think of a more rewarding career, one that is designed solely to decrease suffering and improve quality of life. Finally, I celebrate those moments where I see hope in the eyes of a client, or a recognition of her own greatness, or a long-abandoned hearty laugh. There’s nothing I’d rather do with my life. I consider myself so lucky to do this job.”

—John Duffy, clinical psychologist

Quoted in Margarita Tartakovsky, “Therapists Spill: Why I Love Being a Clinician,” PsychCentral, October 8, 2018. <https://psychcentral.com>.

but so, too, can consultations with colleagues who may have expertise in treating a particular condition. Clinical psychologists also need to keep up with new research and often attend conferences to further their knowledge. Although a session may be a one-on-one experience, clinical psychologists often sit down with clients after much collaboration with others.

A clinical psychologist may work with a client’s primary care physician if, for example, the client has heart disease that may have triggered the onset of depression. If a client has an eating disorder, a psychologist may consult with a nutritionist. With parental permission, a psychologist treating a child may talk with teachers or school officials about behavior or learning issues. A psychologist may also consult with a social worker to help a client whose mental or emotional challenges are interfering with his or her ability to find steady work or pay the bills on time. The problems that a clinical psychologist helps solve often extend into the day-to-day responsibilities of a client and the client’s family.

Although talk-based therapy is the most common treatment employed by clinical psychologists, there are many others. Art therapy, for example, allows clients to draw, paint, use clay, assemble collages or use other art materials to express thoughts

and feelings. Music and dance therapies take a similar approach by finding ways other than words to express oneself. Clinical psychologists might also employ role play, meditation, or even group interaction in their treatments.

No matter what special approach a psychologist uses, the job can be mentally and physically draining. Clinical psychologist Joseph Luciani says that although the work is incredibly rewarding, it requires therapists to take care of themselves:

It can be grueling to see 8, 9, or 10 clients a day. In order to be there for every person who sits in front of you expecting your full attention and dedication, you must take care of your physical health. I start my day at 11:00 a.m. I do this in order to jog every morning, take a yoga class once a week and do some meditation. Just as the yoga postures were designed to enhance the ability to sit quietly and meditate for long hours, so too must a psychologist prepare him or herself for the long periods of sitting while maintaining optimum alertness.²⁰

Education and Training

Most clinical psychologists start by earning a bachelor's degree in psychology. That's usually followed by a master's degree in clinical psychology or a more specialized degree in an area such as child and adolescent psychology. But to have your own psychology practice, you must earn a doctoral degree, usually a doctor of psychology or a doctor of philosophy. Most states require a doctoral degree to work as a clinical psychologist.

At the start of a career, a clinical psychologist usually completes a one- to two-year internship with a practicing psychologist. To practice psychology, you must also become licensed by the state in which you work. In addition to having the educational background, a clinical psychologist must accrue more than one thousand hours of clinical work experience (some states require



A clinical psychologist listens as a young woman explains what is troubling her. Clinical psychologists help clients identify problems that are negatively affecting their lives and help them find ways to address those problems.

more hours). The license must be renewed periodically, and to do so you must take continuing education courses to keep current with changing laws and trends in clinical psychology.

Skills and Personality

Because being a psychologist is literally a job in which you spend all day working on solutions to other people's problems, perhaps the most important trait to have is a desire to help others. "I had always, throughout my life, been intuitively inclined to help people with problems," says Luciani. "Understanding human nature always seemed natural to me. It was this intuition that always made psychological problems seem transparent."²¹

Find Out More

American Psychology Association (APA)

750 First St. NE

Washington, DC 20002

website: www.apa.org

The APA's website includes a "Careers" section that starts with the basics, describing the field of psychology and the range of psychologist jobs one can pursue. You can learn about where the jobs are, how much they pay, and what kind of education it takes to get there.

Careers in Psychology

website: <https://careersinpsychology.org>

Learn more about the varied career paths in psychology, what to look for in a university program, and how experts in the field started out and moved along their own paths. This website also contains articles about mental health breakthroughs and conditions.

Pursuing Psychology Careers Page

website: <https://sites.uni.edu/walsh/linda1.html>

On this web page, University of Northern Iowa psychology professor Linda Walsh has assembled dozens of links related to earning a psychology degree, job descriptions, and how to make the most of your psychology education.

Source Notes

Introduction: Making a Living Solving Problems

1. Quoted in Anuradha K. Herath, “Getting to Mars Means Stopping and Landing,” *AstroBiology Magazine*, April 4, 2011. www.astrobio.net.

Biomedical Engineer

2. Quoted in Alliance for Advanced Biomedical Engineering, “Smart Stents Detect Narrowing Arteries,” July 30, 2018. <https://aabme.asme.org>.
3. Quoted in Alissa Mallinson, February 3, 2015. “Ioannis Yannas to Be Inducted into the Inventors Hall of Fame,” MIT News. <http://news.mit.edu>.
4. Quoted in Alexandrous Houssein, “Succeeding as a Woman in Biological Engineering,” *BMC Series* (blog), January 9, 2019. <http://blogs.biomedcentral.com>.
5. Quoted in ScienceDaily, “Bioengineers Create Ultrasmall, Light-Activated Electrode for Neural Stimulation,” February 15, 2019. www.sciencedaily.com.
6. Quoted in Kurt Schlosser, “Geek of the Week: Bioengineering PhD Shivani Keeps Learning in Search for Ideas at Xinova,” *GeekWire*, October 12, 2018. www.geekwire.com.
7. Quoted in Kasey Panetta, “How This Biomedical Engineer Landed Her Dream Job,” *ECN*, January 9, 2015. www.ecnmag.com.

Human Resources Manager

8. Quoted in Will Erstad, “11 Rewarding Reasons to Work in HR,” Rasmussen College, October 23, 2017. www.rasmussen.edu.

Interview with a Human Resources Manager

Carl Moyer is the human resources (HR) director at Parr Lumber in Portland, Oregon. He has worked as the company's HR manager and then its director for a total of three years. He answered questions about his career by email.

Q: Why did you become a human resources manager?

A: For twenty years, every company I worked for had an HR department that made me crazy. Their service to internal customers was awful (if not dysfunctional), and when I had the opportunity to put my money where my mouth was, I jumped at it. I needed to see if I could solve it, or if I was just a complainer.

Q: How did your previous jobs and education help prepare you for this position?

A: For a decade I was in operations and *used* HR, and for a decade I was in training and worked *with* HR. So, I was familiar with the needs and functions of HR—but I had to learn the subject matter expertise part on the job. While working at Parr, I earned a master's degree in business administration. Working full-time and taking classes part-time was a challenge, but I learned a lot and it definitely made me a stronger candidate when I applied for this job.

Q: Can you describe your typical workday?

A: The typical HR job is firefighting. The phone rings and e-mail comes in from sixty managers and/or any of eight hundred employees with issues and needs for our help. Could be that an employee is not doing a good job, and the manager needs help in holding him accountable. Or, an employee is getting the run-around from the insurance company, and she needs us to help

Other Careers If You Like Problem Solving

Actuary	Judge
Appliance repair	Lawyer
Archaeologist	Mathematician
Architect	Mechanical engineer
Auto mechanic	Mediator
Chief executive	Midwife
Civil engineer	Military officer
Computer engineer	Nurse
Computer systems analyst	Obstetrician
Economist	Ophthalmologist
Emergency medical technician	Orthodontist
Environmental engineer	Physical therapist
Epidemiologist	Physician assistant
Firefighter	Physicist
Forensic scientist	Social worker
Hospitalist	Surgeon
	Veterinarian

Editor's note: The online *Occupational Outlook Handbook* of the US Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics is an excellent source of information on jobs in hundreds of career fields, including many of those listed here. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook* may be accessed online at www.bls.gov/ooh.

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