

that occurs during counseling. You are encouraged to talk about this with your counselor so you can come to a more comfortable resolution. If you don't feel the issue has been resolved you may wish to get a second opinion. You may also review the section of the law that describes forms of unprofessional conduct. Unprofessional conduct includes, but is not limited to:

- \* Misrepresentations or false advertising
- \* Incompetence, negligence or malpractice
- \* Violation of any state or federal code
- \* Willful betrayal of confidentiality

If for any reason you are unable to resolve such a concern with your counselor, you may wish to file a complaint with the Department of Health. Contact the Customer Service Center for assistance:

DOH Customer Service Center  
Phone: (360) 236-4700  
Fax: (360) 236-4818  
Web Site: WWW.DOH.WA.GOV/HSQA  
E-Mail: hpqa.csc@doh.wa.gov  
Address: 310 Israel Road S.E.  
Tumwater, WA. 98501

The Department of Health (DOH) regulates licensed counselors and associates. (18.225 RCW and WAC 246-809). The intent of the rules and laws is to protect the public and ensure the competence of those providing counseling services. Licensed counselors and associates act according to state law, DOH rules, codes of ethics of their national professional organizations, and national laws and regulations.

An advisory committee, made up of members from each of the four licensed counselor groups, and three public members, meets quarterly to provide advice to DOH.

The committee welcomes the public to attend these meetings. Contact DOH for meeting information.

The Health Systems Quality Assurance Division within DOH has information on all health care professionals in the state. This information includes credential status and current restrictions or disciplinary actions, since July of 1998. If you have a question about a provider, contact DOH.

#### **Provider Credential Search Website:**

<https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/Providercredentialsearch/>

#### **Licensed Counselor Websites:**

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/hsqa/Professions/MFT/Default.htm>

<http://www.doh.wa.gov/hsqa/Professions/MentalHealth/default.htm>

[http://www.doh.wa.gov/hsqa/Professions/Social\\_Worker/default.htm](http://www.doh.wa.gov/hsqa/Professions/Social_Worker/default.htm)

#### **Professional Codes of Ethics:**

For more information on ethics, please view the following websites and their ethics information.

American Association for Marriage & Family Therapy:  
[www.aamft.org](http://www.aamft.org)

American Counseling Association:  
[www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)

American Mental Health Counselors Association:  
<http://AMHCA.org>

National Association of Social Workers:  
<http://www.naswdc.org/>

Clinical Social Work Association  
<http://www.clinicalsocialworkassociation.org/>



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For persons with disabilities, this document is available on request in other formats. To submit a request, please call 1-800-525-0127. (TTY/TDD 1-800-833-6388)

# What to Expect from your Licensed

- Mental Health Counselors (LMHC)
- Marriage & Family Therapists (LMFT)
- Advanced Social workers (LASW)
- Independent Clinical Social Workers (LICSW)
- Mental Health Counselor Associate (LMHCA)
- Marriage and Family Therapist Associate (LMFTA)
- Social Work Associate – Advanced (LSWAA)
- Social Work Associate – Independent Clinical (LSWAIC)

**The term licensed counselor refers to LMHC's, LMFT's, LASW's, and LICSW's.**

**The term associate refers to the associate level counselors. This includes LMHCA's, LMFTA's, LSWAA's, and LSWAIC's. An associate has a graduate degree in a mental health field, and is gaining the supervision and supervised experience needed for licensure.**

**The goal of this brochure is to give general information about what you might expect from a Washington State licensed counselor or associate.**

**Our goal is to help you in have a positive counseling experience based on your ability to determine the type of services and the best provider to meet your needs.**

## What You Can Expect From Your Counselor or Associate:

Your licensed counselor or associate is required by law to provide you with a disclosure statement. It should have the following information:

- Qualifications
- Education
- Areas of expertise
- Valid license number
- Description of the types of counseling proposed
- Explanation of potential risks and benefits of such counseling.

They should:

- Inform you of the costs of your treatment, billing practices and how they maintain your medical records.
- Give you the opportunity to discuss matters of confidentiality, privacy, and release of information.
- Assist you in referrals to other professionals, if necessary or requested.
- Treat you with respect and dignity, especially in regard to age, color, culture, disability, ethnicity, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, marital status, or socio-economic status.
- Keep confidentiality. Licensed mental health counselors, licensed independent clinical social workers and licensed marriage and family therapists have testimonial privilege. These providers may not disclose or testify about any information they learned about their client regardless of how they got the information. All information needed to provide the counseling service is considered privileged.

**Remember:** Your involvement in developing treatment goals, requesting a change in approach to treatment, or in decisions about termination of treatment is encouraged!

Once signed and dated by you and your licensed counselor or associate, the disclosure statement keeps it as part of your treatment record.

(Disclosure Information - WAC 246-809-700)

**Licensed counselor or associates** can diagnose and treat mental and emotional disorders. In doing so, they may work with individuals, couples, families, groups and organizations. Goals may include specific behavioral changes, symptom relief, personal growth, and/or the enhancement of well-being. If you have questions that require legal, medical, or other specialized knowledge outside the scope of practice of your licensed counselor or associate, you should be referred to another professional category for assistance with those questions.

You should be aware, that there are other credentialed professionals in the State of Washington that provide counseling services. Other credentialed counselors carry the designation certified counselor, certified adviser or agency affiliated counselor. They provide services but aren't required to meet the same academic/experience standards.

Each of the licensed counselor or associate categories has its own training, experience, supervision and continuing education requirements. The differences generally affect the types of services offered and the cost. Determining the best fit for you, your children, or your family will be your responsibility and challenge. You are encouraged to review the personal disclosure statement of the clinicians you are considering and to ask questions about your particular situation.

### To be a licensed counselor, your provider must have completed:

- A master's or doctorate degree from a program approved by DOH and accredited by nationally recognized standards;
- An approved exam;
- 3,000 to 4,000 hours of supervised post-graduate experience.
- 36 continuing education hours every two years, including six hours of law and ethics.

### To be an associate, your provider must:

- Have completed a master's or doctorate degree from a program approved by DOH and accredited by nationally recognized standards;
- Be under the supervision of an approved supervisor and gaining the experience requirements for full licensure.

## Confidentiality and Health Care Information Access and Disclosure

Your counselor will create records about your counseling process. These records are personal and sensitive. They should be properly documented, stored, retained and released only under specific circumstances. Your counselor should have a clear procedure to ensure confidentiality of your records. You have the right to expect that anything you tell your counselor will be held in confidence with just a very few exceptions:

- If you are involved in a civil or criminal lawsuit, a judge can order your file be turned over to the court;
- If you make statements that a child, elderly, or disabled person has been abused or neglected, law requires your counselor to report that information to the appropriate authorities.
- If you make statements that indicate you intend to harm yourself or others, your counselor may report that information to the appropriate authorities.

There also may be circumstances, such as inquiries from your insurance company, or a need for your counselor to consult with another of your healthcare providers. You will be asked to sign an authorization for release of information about your treatment. You should be informed of the reason for such disclosures and are encouraged to ask questions about anything that is unclear to you, prior to signing this authorization.

## Maintaining a Professional Relationship

Your relationship with your counselor should be professional in nature. Counseling deals with the most private aspects of your life. It is your counselor's responsibility to ensure an atmosphere of safety for you. Counselors should not invite you into a business venture, ask you for personal favors, subcontract with you for services, or engage in any sexual contact with you. If you are involved with a counselor in another relationship, such as a personal friend or a business relationship, you and your counselor should discuss the effect of these multiple relationships on services you may receive and take precautions for your own best interests.

Counseling often deals with difficult and emotional issues. There may be a time when you feel confused or troubled by something