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## Counselors

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### Significant Points

- People interested in counseling should have a strong desire to help others and should be able to inspire respect, trust, and confidence.
- Education and training requirements vary by State and specialty, but a master's degree is required to become a licensed counselor.
- Projected job growth varies by specialty, but job opportunities should be favorable as job openings are expected to exceed the number of graduates from counseling programs.

### Nature of the Work

Counselors work in diverse community settings designed to provide a variety of counseling, rehabilitation, and support services. Their duties vary greatly, depending on their specialty, which is determined by the setting in which they work and the population they serve. Although the specific setting may have an implied scope of practice, counselors frequently are challenged with children, adolescents, adults, or families that have multiple issues, such as mental health disorders and addiction, disability and employment needs, school problems or career counseling needs, and trauma. Counselors must recognize these issues in order to provide their clients with appropriate counseling and support.

*Educational, vocational, and school counselors* provide individuals and groups with career, personal, social and educational counseling. School counselors assist students of all levels, from elementary school to postsecondary education. They advocate for students and work with other individuals and organizations to promote the academic, career, personal, and social development of children and youth. School counselors help students evaluate their abilities, interests, talents, and personalities to develop realistic academic and career goals. Counselors use interviews, counseling sessions, interest and aptitude assessment tests, and other methods to evaluate and advise students. They also operate career information centers and career education programs. Often, counselors work with students who have academic and social development problems or other special needs.

*Elementary school counselors* provide individual, small-group, and classroom guidance services to students. Counselors observe children during classroom and play activities and confer with their teachers and parents to evaluate the children's strengths, problems, or special needs. In conjunction with teachers and administrators, they make sure that the curriculum addresses both the academic and the developmental needs of students. Elementary school counselors do less vocational and academic counseling than high school counselors do.

*High school counselors* advise students regarding college majors, admission requirements, entrance exams, financial aid, trade or technical schools, and apprenticeship programs. They help students develop job search skills, such as resume writing and interviewing techniques. College career planning

and placement counselors assist alumni or students with career development and job-hunting techniques.

School counselors at all levels help students to understand and deal with social, behavioral, and personal problems. These counselors emphasize preventive and developmental counseling to enhance students' personal, social, and academic growth and to provide students with the life skills needed to deal with problems before they worsen. Counselors provide special services, including alcohol and drug prevention programs and conflict resolution classes. They also try to identify cases of domestic abuse and other family problems that can affect a student's development.

Counselors interact with students individually, in small groups, or as an entire class. They consult and collaborate with parents, teachers, school administrators, school psychologists, medical professionals, and social workers to develop and implement strategies to help students succeed.

*Vocational counselors*, also called *employment counselors* or *career counselors*, usually provide career counseling outside the school setting. Their chief focus is helping individuals with career decisions. Vocational counselors explore and evaluate the client's education, training, work history, interests, skills, and personality traits. They may arrange for aptitude and achievement tests to help the client make career decisions. They also work with individuals to develop their job-search skills and assist clients in locating and applying for jobs. In addition, career counselors provide support to people experiencing job loss, job stress, or other career transition issues.

*Rehabilitation counselors* help people deal with the personal, social, and vocational effects of disabilities. They counsel people with both physical and emotional disabilities resulting from birth defects, illness or disease, accidents, or other causes. They evaluate the strengths and limitations of individuals, provide personal and vocational counseling, offer case management support, and arrange for medical care, vocational training, and job placement. Rehabilitation counselors interview both individuals with disabilities and their families, evaluate school and medical reports, and confer with physicians, psychologists, employers, and physical, occupational, and speech therapists to



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## Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2008	Projected Employment, 2018	Change, 2008-2018	
				Number	Percent
Counselors.....	21-1010	665,500	782,200	116,800	18
Substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors.....	21-1011	86,100	104,200	18,100	21
Educational, vocational, and school counselors.....	21-1012	275,800	314,400	38,600	14
Marriage and family therapists .....	21-1013	27,300	31,300	3,900	14
Mental health counselors .....	21-1014	113,300	140,400	27,200	24
Rehabilitation counselors.....	21-1015	129,500	154,100	24,500	19
Counselors, all other .....	21-1019	33,400	37,800	4,400	13

(NOTE) Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

determine the capabilities and skills of the individual. They develop individual rehabilitation programs by conferring with the client. These programs often include training to help individuals develop job skills, become employed, and provide opportunities for community integration. Rehabilitation counselors are trained to recognize and to help lessen environmental and attitudinal barriers. Such help may include providing education, and advocacy services to individuals, families, employers, and others in the community. Rehabilitation counselors work toward increasing the person's capacity to live independently by facilitating and coordinating with other service providers.

*Mental health counselors* work with individuals, families, and groups to address and treat mental and emotional disorders and to promote mental health. They are trained in a variety of therapeutic techniques used to address issues such as depression, anxiety, addiction and substance abuse, suicidal impulses, stress, trauma, low self-esteem, and grief. They also help with job and career concerns, educational decisions, mental and emotional health issues, and relationship problems. In addition, they may be involved in community outreach, advocacy, and mediation activities. Some specialize in delivering mental health services for the elderly. Mental health counselors often work closely with other mental health specialists, such as psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical social workers, psychiatric nurses, and school counselors. (Information on psychologists, registered nurses, social workers, and physicians and surgeons, which includes psychiatrists, appears elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

*Substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors* help people who have problems with alcohol, drugs, gambling, and eating disorders. They counsel individuals to help them to identify behaviors and problems related to their addiction. Counseling can be done on an individual basis, but is frequently done in a group setting and can include crisis counseling, daily or weekly counseling, or drop-in counseling supports. Counselors are trained to assist in developing personalized recovery programs that help to establish healthy behaviors and provide coping strategies. Often, these counselors also will work with family members who are affected by the addictions of their loved ones. Some counselors conduct programs and community outreach aimed at preventing addiction and educating the public. Counselors must be able to recognize how addiction affects the entire person and those around him or her.

*Marriage and family therapists* apply family systems theory, principles, and techniques to address and treat mental and

emotional disorders. In doing so, they modify people's perceptions and behaviors, enhance communication and understanding among family members, and help to prevent family and individual crises. They may work with individuals, families, couples, and groups. Marriage and family therapy differs from traditional therapy because less emphasis is placed on an identified client or internal psychological conflict. The focus is on viewing and understanding their clients' symptoms and interactions within their existing environment. Marriage and family therapists also may make appropriate referrals to psychiatric resources, perform research, and teach courses in human development and interpersonal relationships.

**Work environment.** The work environment can vary greatly, depending on the occupational specialty. School counselors work predominantly in schools, where they usually have an office but also may work in classrooms. Other counselors may work in a private practice, community health organizations, day treatment programs, or hospitals. Many counselors work in an office where they see clients throughout the day, although counselors may frequently be required to provide services out in the community.

### Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Education and training requirements for counselors are often very detailed and vary by State and specialty, but a master's degree usually is required to become a licensed counselor. Prospective counselors should check with State and local governments, prospective employers, and national voluntary certification organizations to determine which requirements apply.

**Education and training.** Education requirements vary with the occupational specialty and State licensure and certification requirements. A master's degree usually is required to be licensed or certified as a counselor. Counselor education programs in colleges and universities often are found in departments of education, psychology, or human services. Fields of study may include college student affairs, elementary or secondary school counseling, education, gerontological counseling, marriage and family therapy, substance abuse or addictions counseling, rehabilitation counseling, agency or community counseling, clinical mental health counseling, career counseling, and related fields. Courses frequently are grouped into core areas, including human growth and development, social and cultural diversity, relationships, group work, career development, counseling techniques, assessment, research and

program evaluation, and professional ethics and identity. In an accredited master's degree program, 48 to 60 semester hours of graduate study, including a period of supervised clinical experience in counseling, typically are required.

Some employers provide training for newly hired counselors. Others may offer time off or tuition assistance to complete a graduate degree. Often, counselors must participate in graduate studies, workshops, and personal studies to maintain their certificates and licenses.

**Licensure.** Licensure requirements differ greatly by State, occupational specialty, and work setting. Some States require school counselors to hold a State school counseling certification and to have completed at least some graduate coursework; most require the completion of a master's degree. Some States require school counselors to be licensed, which generally entails completing continuing education credits. Some States require public school counselors to have both counseling and teaching certificates and to have had some teaching experience.

For counselors based outside of schools, 49 States and the District of Columbia have some form of counselor licensure that governs the practice of counseling. In addition, all 50 States and the District of Columbia have some licensure requirement for marriage and family therapists. Requirements for both counselors and marriage and family therapists typically include the completion of a master's degree in counseling or marriage and family therapy, the accumulation of 2 years or 3,000 hours of supervised clinical experience beyond the master's degree level, the passage of a State-recognized exam, adherence to ethical codes and standards, and the completion of annual continuing education credits. However, counselors working in certain settings or in a particular specialty may face different licensure requirements. For example, a career counselor working in private practice may need a license, but a counselor working for a college career center may not. In addition, substance abuse and behavior disorder counselors generally are governed by a different State agency or board than are other counselors. The criteria for their licensure can vary greatly, and in some cases these counselors may need only a high school diploma and certification. Those interested in entering the field must research State and specialty requirements to determine what qualifications are necessary.

**Other qualifications.** People interested in counseling should have a strong desire to help others and should be able to inspire respect, trust, and confidence. They should be able to work independently or as part of a team. Counselors must follow the code of ethics associated with their respective certifications and licenses.

Counselors must possess high physical and emotional energy to handle the array of problems that they address. Dealing daily with these problems can cause stress.

**Certification and advancement.** Some counselors elect to be certified by the National Board for Certified Counselors, which grants a general practice credential of National Certified Counselor. This national certification is voluntary and is distinct from State licensing. However, in some States, those who pass the national exam are exempt from taking a State certification exam. The board also offers specialty certifications in school, clinical mental health, and addiction counseling.

The Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification offers voluntary national certification for rehabilitation counselors. Many State and local governments and other employers require rehabilitation counselors to have this certification. To become certified, rehabilitation counselors usually must graduate from an accredited educational program, complete an internship, and pass a written examination. Certification requirements vary, however, according to an applicant's educational history. Employment experience, for example, is required for those with a counseling degree in a specialty other than rehabilitation. To maintain their certification, counselors must successfully retake the certification exam or complete 100 credit hours of acceptable continuing education every 5 years.

Other counseling organizations also offer certification in particular counseling specialties. Usually, becoming certified is voluntary, but having certification may enhance one's job prospects.

Prospects for advancement vary by counseling field. School counselors can become directors or supervisors of counseling, guidance, or pupil personnel services; or, usually with further graduate education, they may become counselor educators, counseling psychologists, or school administrators. (Psychologists and education administrators are covered elsewhere in the *Handbook*.) Some counselors choose to work for a State's department of education.

Some marriage and family therapists, especially those with doctorates in family therapy, become supervisors, teachers, researchers, or advanced clinicians in the discipline. Counselors also may become supervisors or administrators in their agencies. Some counselors move into research, consulting, or college teaching or go into private or group practice. Some may choose to pursue a doctoral degree to improve their chances for advancement.

## Employment

Counselors held about 665,500 jobs in 2008. Employment was distributed among the counseling specialties as follows:

Educational, vocational, and school counselors.....	275,800
Rehabilitation counselors.....	129,500
Mental health counselors.....	113,300
Substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors..	86,100
Marriage and family therapists.....	27,300
Counselors, all other.....	33,400

A growing number of counselors are self-employed and work in group practices or private practice, due in part to laws allowing counselors to be paid for their services by insurance companies and to the growing recognition that counselors are well-trained, effective professionals.

## Job Outlook

Employment is expected to grow faster than the average for all occupations. Projected job growth varies by specialty, but job opportunities should be favorable because job openings are expected to exceed the number of graduates from counseling programs, especially in rural areas.

**Employment change.** Overall employment of counselors is expected to increase by 18 percent between 2008 and 2018,

which is faster than the average for all occupations. However, growth is expected to vary by specialty.

Employment of substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors is expected to grow by 21 percent, which is much faster than the average for all occupations. As society becomes more knowledgeable about addiction, more people are seeking treatment. Furthermore, drug offenders are increasingly being sent to treatment programs rather than to jail.

Employment for educational, vocational, and school counselors is expected to grow by 14 percent, which is faster than the average for all occupations. Demand for vocational or career counselors should grow as multiple job and career changes become common and as workers become increasingly aware of counseling services. States require elementary schools to employ counselors. Expansion of the responsibilities of school counselors also is likely to lead to increases in their employment. For example, counselors are becoming more involved in crisis and preventive counseling, helping students deal with issues ranging from drug and alcohol abuse to death and suicide. Although schools and governments realize the value of counselors in helping their students to achieve academic success, budget constraints at every school level will dampen the job growth of school counselors. Federal grants and subsidies may help to offset tight budgets and allow the reduction in student-to-counselor ratios to continue.

Employment of mental health counselors is expected to grow by 24 percent, which is much faster than the average for all occupations. Under managed care systems, insurance companies increasingly are providing for reimbursement of counselors as a less costly alternative to psychiatrists and psychologists. In addition, there has been increased demand for mental health services as individuals become more willing to seek help.

Jobs for rehabilitation counselors are expected to grow by 19 percent, which is faster than the average for all occupations. The number of people who will need rehabilitation counseling will increase as the size of the elderly population, whose members become injured or disabled at a higher rate than other age groups, increases and as treatment for mental health related disabilities increases.

Marriage and family therapists will experience growth of 14 percent, which is faster than the average for all occupations, in part because of an increased recognition of the field. It is becoming more common for people to seek help for their marital and family problems than it was in the past.

**Job prospects.** Job opportunities should be favorable because job openings are expected to exceed the number of graduates from counseling programs, particularly in rural areas. Substance abuse counselors should enjoy particularly good job prospects.

## Earnings

Median annual wages of educational, vocational, and school counselors in May 2008 were \$51,050. The middle 50 percent earned between \$38,740 and \$65,360. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$29,360, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$82,330. School counselors can earn additional income by working summers in the school system or in other jobs. Median annual wages in the industries employing the largest

numbers of educational, vocational, and school counselors were as follows:

Elementary and secondary schools .....	\$57,800
Junior colleges.....	50,440
Colleges, universities, and professional schools .....	43,980
Vocational rehabilitation services.....	35,220
Individual and family services .....	33,780

Median annual wages of substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors in May 2008 were \$37,030. The middle 50 percent earned between \$29,410 and \$47,290. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$24,240, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$59,460. Median annual wages in the industries employing the largest numbers of substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors were as follows:

General medical and surgical hospitals.....	\$44,130
Local government.....	41,660
Outpatient care centers.....	36,650
Individual and family services .....	35,210
Residential mental retardation, mental health and substance facilities.....	31,300

Median annual wages of mental health counselors in May 2008 were \$36,810. The middle 50 percent earned between \$28,930 and \$48,580. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$23,580, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$63,100. Median annual wages in the industries employing the largest numbers of mental health counselors were as follows:

Local government.....	\$45,510
Offices of other health practitioners.....	40,880
Outpatient care centers.....	37,590
Individual and family services .....	36,130
Residential mental retardation, mental health and substance abuse facilities.....	29,950

Median annual wages of rehabilitation counselors in May 2008 were \$30,930. The middle 50 percent earned between \$24,110 and \$41,240. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$20,150, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$56,550. Median annual wages in the industries employing the largest numbers of rehabilitation counselors were as follows:

State government.....	\$45,350
Local government.....	38,800
Vocational rehabilitation services.....	29,060
Individual and family services .....	28,290
Residential mental retardation, mental health and substance facilities.....	25,950

Median annual wages of marriage and family therapists in May 2008 were \$44,590. The middle 50 percent earned between \$34,840 and \$56,320. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$27,810, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$70,830. Median annual wages in the industries employing the largest numbers of marriage and family therapists were as follows:

State government.....	\$50,770
Local government.....	48,220
Outpatient care centers.....	46,830

Offices of other health practitioners.....	41,220
Individual and family services .....	39,690

Self-employed counselors who have well-established practices, as well as counselors employed in group practices, usually have the highest earnings.

### Related Occupations

Counselors help people evaluate their interests, abilities, and disabilities and deal with personal, social, academic, and career problems. Others who help people in similar ways include:

- Human resources, training, and labor relations managers and specialists
- Occupational therapists
- Physicians and surgeons
- Psychologists
- Registered nurses
- Social and human service assistants
- Social workers
- Teachers—kindergarten, elementary, middle, and secondary
- Teachers—special education

### Sources of Additional Information

For general information about counseling, as well as information on specialties such as school, college, mental health, rehabilitation, multicultural, career, marriage and family, and gerontological counseling, contact:

➤ American Counseling Association, 5999 Stevenson Ave., Alexandria, VA 22304. Internet: <http://www.counseling.org>

For information on school counselors, contact:

➤ American School Counselors Association, 1101 King St., Suite 625, Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet: <http://www.schoolcounselor.org>

For information on mental health counselors, contact:

➤ American Mental Health Counselors Association, 801 N. Fairfax St., Suite 304, Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet: <http://www.amhca.org>

For information on marriage and family therapists, contact:

➤ American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, 112 South Alfred St., Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet: <http://www.aamft.org>

For information on accredited counseling and related training programs, contact:

➤ Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, American Counseling Association, 1001 N. Fairfax St., Suite 510, Alexandria, VA 22314. Internet: <http://www.cacrep.org>

For information on national certification requirements for counselors, contact:

➤ National Board for Certified Counselors, Inc, 3 Terrace Way, Greensboro, NC 27403. Internet: <http://www.nbcc.org>

State departments of education can supply information on colleges and universities offering guidance and counseling training that meets State certification and licensure requirements.

State employment service offices have information about job opportunities and entrance requirements for counselors.

The Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) provides information on a wide range of occupational characteristics. Links to O\*NET appear at the end of the Internet version of this occupational statement, accessible at <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/ocos067.htm>