



WHAT IS A CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST ANYWAY?

At the time of seeking psychological help people are normally feeling very anxious, distressed and upset. The last thing they need is to be hit with the very confusing world of therapists and therapies. What is the difference between a Clinical Psychologist and a Psychiatrist? What about Counsellors? How am I meant to know what would help me the most?

When we set up our online Family Consultation service, we wanted to help with this very issue. We wanted to give people the opportunity to explore and define their difficulties while providing them with a space to discuss different therapeutic options and what they would look like; from guiding clients to find the right therapist (psychologist or otherwise) for longer term therapeutic work, to arranging a few further consultation sessions to support change in a more light-touch manner, we wanted to be there for people to muddle through the confusion that is synonymous with the vast psychology world and its terminology.

To help you make an informed decision when seeking out that initial support, we have explained exactly what a Clinical Psychologist is and how they differ from other mental health practitioners.

What exactly is a Clinical Psychologist?

Here at Pocket Family Psychologist, we are all Clinical Psychologists. This means we have done a minimum of 6 years of psychology education and training.

First we must complete a degree in psychology in which we learn about the brain and behaviour, consciousness, language and thinking, cognitive, social and emotional development as well as A LOT of statistics, science and research methods – it is an ongoing debate as to whether psychology is an Arts or Science based subject.

We must then complete a 3-year Doctorate programme in Clinical Psychology in which we learn to do our job and become qualified as Clinical Psychologists. We must do lots more maths and develop our research skills while also completing placements in the NHS, very much like a medical doctor's training. We work under the supervision of qualified Clinical Psychologists on placements covering Learning Disabilities, Adult Mental Health, Child and Adolescent Mental Health, Older Adults, Neurological Difficulties and injuries and other specialist areas. I personally completed specialist placements in Looked After Children and Family Therapy while on the Doctorate. We are also taught how to complete in-depth assessments as well as learn to conduct several different psychological theories and therapies, developing specialist skills in at least two of these. Typically, practitioners choose to study intensively Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, Systemic/Family Therapy and Psychodynamic approaches.

Getting onto the Doctorate course is highly competitive, so most people have to work for a few years as an Assistant Psychologist and/or complete a master's degree before being accepted onto the Doctorate course.

Please go to our website www.pocketfamilypsychologist.com for additional family resources.

I personally completed a master's degree in Forensic Psychology and worked as a Forensic Psychologist in the Prison Service for two years before being accepted onto the Doctorate for Clinical Psychology. It was really here that my interest in trauma was piqued.

What do Clinical Psychologists do (after all that training)?

Assessments – Clinical Psychologists carry out an assessment at the beginning of all therapeutic work. Often this may mean a session filled with questions completed together with a questionnaire. Psychologists are trained to use objective questionnaires that have been widely researched in addition to our own clinical interviews and questions that we have developed over the years of practice. We ask questions that help clients to identify and understand their psychological, emotional, and behavioural difficulties or patterns. We look to clarify the client's goals and determine a plan of action to achieve these. At Pocket Family Psychologist, your first Family Consultation would include this type of assessment.

Specialist Assessments – Clinical Psychologists are also trained to carry out specialist and in-depth assessments of neurological, cognitive, and intellectual functioning; mental health; and attachment/family relationships. In our team, Dr Ananda van den Heuvel carries out developmental disorder assessments with children in her NHS job while Dr Andrea Shortland and Dr Louisa Stokou carry out specialist attachment and mental health assessments of children and families.

Therapy – Clinical Psychologists often deliver therapeutic work with children, adults, families, and groups, spanning ages, genders, sexuality, and cultures. We are trained to understand and work with all sorts of issues including depression, ASD, trauma, anxiety, relationship issues, psychosis, parenting, the list goes on.... Our therapeutic approach is flexible and tailored to the individual person or family. We integrate the various therapeutic approaches to ensure the most efficacious method of therapy is delivered to our clients.

Consultation and Supervision – Clinical Psychologists also provide supervision or consultation to other professionals including medics, nurses and Occupational Therapists in psychiatric, neurological wards and services.

Research – Clinical Psychologists are trained to carry out, understand and apply the latest research into psychological issues and 'what therapies work for who'. At Pocket Family Psychologist, our team completed research as part of their doctoral courses and we continually assess our work by using questionnaires to understand the effectiveness of therapy for each client, to ensure we perpetually improve.



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How is a Clinical Psychologist different to a Psychiatrist or Counsellor?

Psychiatrists are medically trained before they specialise in mental health. This means that overall, they tend to see psychological difficulties as medical diagnoses and brain disorders that can be treated with medication. Overall, psychologists think more around emotional responses, behaviours and coping strategies that have been created to adapt but may no longer be serving the client or family. We tend to explore the root cause of the issues, rather than medicate the symptoms. However, there are also some psychiatrists that think more psychologically and some psychologists that tend to think more medically/diagnostically – it can never be simple, eh!!!

Counsellors of Therapists have normally completed a diploma or degree level qualification that takes between three to five years to complete. Qualification requires a minimum number of client hours acquired through a work placement and training is delivered in one specific therapeutic approach such as CBT, psychodynamic or Family/Systemic Therapy. This makes them very specialised in a single therapy, but they are not typically trained in other therapeutic approaches or assessment tools. CBT therapists or Family therapists can often be less expensive than psychologists, simply because the treatment you will receive from a psychologist can be broader and incorporate a multitude of approaches, over just a single therapy.

Formulation over diagnosis – As Clinical Psychologists, we can diagnose but often choose not to. We find it more helpful to take a broader view of the client's difficulties and ask, "what has happened?" and "how is this difficulty working in your family system?" rather than, "what is wrong with you?". There are exceptions to this with some psychologists involved in diagnosing disorders such as the diagnosis of developmental disorders including, Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and ADHD.

Other sorts of psychologists

There are also:

- Occupational Psychologist
- Counselling Psychologists
- Educational Psychologists
- Forensic Psychologists
- Health Psychologists
- High Intensity Therapists
- Sport and Exercise Psychologists
- Neuropsychologists
- Psychological Wellbeing Practitioners



Watch out!

In the UK, the title 'psychologist' is not protected which means that anyone can claim to be a psychologist. To ensure a psychologist is fully trained, insured and monitored professionally, make sure they are registered with the HCPC (our governing body) as a 'Psychologist Practitioner'.

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