

If you don't feel the issue has been resolved, you may wish to get a second opinion from another counselor, and/or 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 **Department of Health Customer Service Center** for assistance.

In July 2001 the Washington State Legislature authorized the licensing of counselors and gave the Department of Health regulatory power (WAC 246-810). The intent of the rules and laws developed (18.255 RCW) is to protect the public and ensure the competence of professionals providing counseling services. Licensed counselors act in accordance with state law and Department of Health rules, as well as the Codes of Ethics of their national professional organizations.

An advisory committee made up of members from each of the four licensed counselor professions, plus three public members, meets regularly to advise the Department of Health and to assure collaboration between profes-

sionals, the Department of Health, and the public. The public is welcome and encouraged to attend these meetings. Contact the Department of Health for meeting information.

Provider Credential Search Website

The Department of Health's Office of Health Professions Quality Assurance provides easy access to information on the 300,000 health care professionals in the state, including license status of professionals throughout the state and current restrictions or disciplinary actions. If you have a question regarding a specific provider, you are also encouraged to contact the Department of Health.

https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/hpqa1/Application/Credential_Search/profile.asp

Licensed Counselor Websites

For more information regarding ethics, please view the following websites for ethics information.

https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/hpqa1/hps7/marriage_family_therapist/default.htm

https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/hpqa1/hps7/mental_health_counselor/default.htm

https://fortress.wa.gov/doh/hpqa1/hps7/social_worker/default.htm

Professional Codes of Ethics

American Association for Marriage & Family Therapy

aamft.org

American Counseling Association

counseling.org

American Mental Health Counselors Association

amhca.org

National Association of Social Workers

socialworkers.org

Clinical Social Work Federation

cswf.org


Washington State Department of
Health
Customer Service Center
310 Israel Road SE
Tumwater, WA 98501
Phone: (360) 236-4700
Fax: (360) 236-4818
Web Site: www.doh.wa.gov
Email: hpqacsc@doh.wa.gov

DOH-Pub 670-089 (1/2007)

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)

The intent of this brochure is to provide you with some general information regarding what you might expect from Licensed Counselors in Washington State.

Our goal is to assist you to have a more 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 Licensed Counselor

Your counselor is required by law to provide you with a document referred to as a *Personal Disclosure Statement* that should contain the following information: their qualifications, education, areas of expertise, and a valid license number; a description of the types of counseling proposed, along with some explanation of potential risks and benefits of such counseling.

- *Your licensed counselor should inform you of the costs of your treatment, billing practices, and the way your medical records are kept and maintained.*
- *Your licensed counselor should give you the opportunity to discuss matters of confidentiality, privacy, and release of information, as well as limitations on confidentiality.*
- *Your licensed counselor should assist you in referral to other professionals when necessary or requested.*
- *Your licensed counselor should 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.*

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

Once signed and dated by you and your counselor, the *Disclosure Statement* essentially becomes a treatment contract and is kept as part of your treatment record.

(DISCLOSURE INFORMATION - WAC 246-809-700)

Licensed Counselors are permitted by law to 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 that is outside the scope of practice of your counselor, you should be referred to another category of professional for assistance with those questions.

The public should be aware that there are other licensed professionals in the state of Washington who also provide counseling services. In addition, there are unlicensed counselors who carry the designation of “registered counselor” who provide these services, but aren’t required to meet the licensed counselor standards.

Each of these licensed counselor 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 Licensed, Your Counselor Must Have Successfully Completed

- A master’s or doctorate degree from a program approved by the Department of

Health and accredited by nationally recognized standards.

- An approved examination.
- A supervised post-graduate practice of between 3,000 and 4,000 hours.
- 36 continuing education hours each 2 years, including Ethics and the Law.

Confidentiality and Health Care Information Access and Disclosure

Your counselor will create records relating to your counseling process. These records are personal and sensitive and therefore 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, your counselor is required by law 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 may also be circumstances where you are asked to sign an authorization for release of information regarding your treatment. These may include inquiries from your insurance company, or a need for your counselor to con-

sult with another of your healthcare providers, 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.

(Chapter 70.02 RCW-Uniform Health Care Act and Federal Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) standards regulate these policies.)

Maintaining A Professional Relationship

Your relationship with your counselor should be strictly professional in nature. Since counseling by its very nature deals with the most private aspects of your life, it is your licensed counselor’s responsibility to ensure an atmosphere of safety for you, free from any exploitation. For example, a licensed counselor 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 licensed 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 so that your treatment is not at risk.

The process of counseling often deals with difficult and emotionally charged issues. You need to feel as safe as possible in order to work on these issues. There may be times when you find yourself feeling confused or troubled by something that occurs in the course of counseling.

You are encouraged to talk with your counselor to come to a more comfortable resolution.