

Who are Marriage and Family Therapists?

Marriage and Family Therapists (MFTs) are mental health professionals trained in psychotherapy and family systems, and licensed to diagnose and treat mental and emotional disorders within the context of marriage, couples and family systems.

Marriage and family therapists are a highly experienced group of practitioners, with an average of 13 years of clinical practice in the field of marriage and family therapy. They evaluate and treat mental and emotional disorders, other health and behavioral problems, and address a wide array of relationship issues within the context of the family system.

Marriage and Family Therapists broaden the traditional emphasis on the individual to attend to the nature and role of individuals in primary relationship networks such as marriage and the family. MFTs take a holistic perspective to health care; they are concerned with the overall, long-term well-being of individuals and their families.

MFTs have graduate training (a Master's or Doctoral degree) in marriage and family therapy and at least two years of clinical experience. Marriage and family therapists are recognized as a "core" mental health profession, along with psychiatry, psychology, social work and psychiatric nursing.

Since 1970 there has been a 50-fold increase in the number of marriage and family therapists. At any given time they are treating over 1.8 million people.

Why use a Marriage and Family Therapist?

Research studies repeatedly demonstrate the effectiveness of marriage and family therapy in treating the full range of mental and emotional disorders and health problems. Adolescent drug abuse, depression, alcoholism, obesity and dementia in the elderly -- as well as marital distress and conflict -- are just some of the conditions Marriage and Family Therapists effectively treat.

Studies also show that clients are highly satisfied with services of Marriage and Family Therapists. Clients report marked improvement in work productivity, co-worker relationships, family relationships, partner relationships, emotional health, overall health, social life, and community involvement

In a recent study, consumers report that marriage and family therapists are the mental health professionals they would most likely recommend to friends. Over 98 percent of clients of marriage and family therapists report therapy services as good or excellent.

After receiving treatment, almost 90% of clients report an improvement in their emotional health, and nearly two-thirds report an improvement in their overall physical health. A majority of clients report an improvement in their functioning at work, and over three-fourths of those receiving marital/couples or family therapy report an improvement in the couple relationship. When a child is the identified patient, parents report that their child's behavior improved in 73.7% of the cases, their ability to get along with other children significantly improved and there was improved performance in school.

Marriage and family therapy's prominence in the mental health field has increased due to its brief, solution-focused treatment, its family-centered approach, and its demonstrated effectiveness. Marriage and family therapists are licensed or certified in 48 states and are recognized by the federal government as members of a distinct mental health discipline.

Today more than 50,000 marriage and family therapists treat individuals, couples, and families nationwide. Membership in the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT) has grown from 237 members in 1960 to more than 23,000 in 1996. This growth is a result, in part, of renewed public awareness of the value of family life and concern about the increased stresses on families in a rapidly changing world.

What are the qualifications for a Marriage and Family Therapist?

Marriage and family therapy is a distinct professional discipline with graduate and post graduate programs. Three options are available for those interested in becoming a marriage and family therapist: master's degree (2-3 years), doctoral program (3-5 years), or post-graduate clinical training programs (3-4 years). Historically,

marriage and family therapists have come from a wide variety of educational backgrounds including psychology, psychiatry, social work, nursing, pastoral counseling and education.

The Federal government has designated marriage and family therapy as a core mental health profession along with psychiatry, psychology, social work and psychiatric nursing. Currently 48 states also support and regulate the profession by licensing or certifying marriage and family therapists with many other states considering licensing bills.

The regulatory requirements in most states are substantially equivalent to the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists Clinical Membership standards. After graduation from an accredited program, a period - usually two years - of post-degree supervised clinical experience is necessary before licensure or certification. When the supervision period is completed, the therapist can take a state licensing exam, or the national examination for marriage and family therapists conducted by the AAMFT Regulatory Boards. This exam is used as a licensure requirement in most states.

Source : American Association of Marriage and Family Therapy
http://www.aamft.org/faqs/index_nm.asp