

FOR YOUR PEACE OF  
**MIND**

A Consumer Guide to  
Psychological Services



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## ***You're Not Alone***

Perhaps you are seeking treatment for depression, stress or anxiety. You or your family may be considering counseling or therapy to improve the quality of important relationships. There are many reasons people turn to psychologists. If you are reaching out for help from a psychologist, you are not alone.

Psychological problems affect millions of people worldwide. They are more prevalent than cancer, diabetes, arthritis, and traffic accidents and second only to heart conditions. Psychologists are specially trained to assist this large population, and their services help sufferers effectively deal with their problems so that they can live happier, healthier lives.

Every year thousands of Californians visit professional psychologists for help in better understanding themselves and others and in dealing with personal problems. If you think you may need to see a psychologist, this brochure can help. It will explain your rights as a patient, provide guidance for choosing a psychologist and explain what a psychologist should and should NOT do. It also will tell you what to do if you think your psychologist has acted unprofessionally.

## **How Can a Psychologist Help You?**

Psychologists provide many important services. They develop, give and interpret psychological tests. For example, they perform intelligence and achievement evaluations, disability evaluations,

workers' compensation evaluations, fitness-for-duty evaluations, and child-custody evaluations. They also help patients understand and resolve various psychological problems like depression, anxiety and substance abuse. They may provide treatment to individuals (adults and children), couples, families, groups, organizations or businesses using behavior modification, psychotherapy, hypnosis, or consultation. They provide these services in in-patient psychiatric hospitals, day treatment programs, and out-patient offices.

When providing assessment or treatment, psychologists take into account personal characteristics that make each patient unique. These factors include age, gender, gender identity, race, ethnicity, culture, national origin, religion, sexual orientation, disability, language, and socioeconomic status. Psychologists' understanding and sensitivity to the impact of these various qualities allows them to provide service to many different people.

Although psychologists in California do not prescribe medications, they may be helpful in providing appropriate physician or psychiatric referrals. Additionally, psychologists play key roles in management consultation for businesses and other organizations.

## **The California Board of Psychology Works to Protect Consumers**

The California Board of Psychology protects consumers of psychological services by ensuring high standards for the practice of psychology. The Board establishes rigorous licensing qualifications, investigates patient complaints, and reaches out to empower consumers with information and resources.

The Board of Psychology is part of the California Department of Consumer Affairs. Board members include both licensed psychologists and members of the public.

# Patients' Bill of Rights

## You have the right to:

- » Request and receive information about the psychologist's professional capabilities, including license status, education, training, experience, professional association membership, specialization, and specific areas of competence.
- » Verify the status of the psychologist's license with the Board of Psychology and receive information about any license discipline. You can do this on the Board's website at [www.psychology.ca.gov](http://www.psychology.ca.gov). Click on "license verification."
- » Have a discussion with the psychologist about fees, billing arrangements, and the nature and anticipated course of sessions.
- » Be provided a safe environment, free from sexual, physical or emotional abuse, when in the care of a psychologist.
- » Expect that your psychologist should not involve you or anyone who is a close relative, guardian, or significant other in sexual intimacies.
- » Ask questions about your therapy or psychological assessment.
- » Refuse to answer any question or disclose any information you choose not to reveal.

- » Request that the psychologist inform you of your progress.
- » Know if there are supervisors, consultants, students, registered psychological assistants, or others with whom your psychologist will discuss your case.
- » Refuse a particular type of treatment or end treatment at any time without obligation or harassment.
- » Refuse or request electronic recording of your sessions.
- » Request and (in most cases) receive a copy of your records, including the diagnosis, treatment plan, your progress, and type of treatment.
- » Report unprofessional behavior by a psychologist (see section titled “what psychologists are not supposed to do,” page 15).
- » Receive a second opinion at any time about your therapy or about your psychologist’s methods.
- » Receive referral names, addresses and telephone numbers in the event that your therapy needs to be transferred to someone else and to request that a copy or a summary of your records be sent to any therapist or agency you choose.

## How is a Psychologist Trained, Educated and Licensed?

In California, with certain exceptions, only licensed psychologists may practice psychology independently. To become licensed, an individual must have an acceptable doctorate degree (a Ph.D., Psy.D., Ed.D.), practice psychology under direct supervision for two years, and pass national and California examinations.

While an individual is practicing psychology under direct supervision in order to meet the licensure requirements, the supervisor is responsible for informing each patient in writing that the supervisee is unlicensed and is functioning under the direction and supervision of the supervisor. The primary supervisor must be a qualified, licensed mental health professional.

In addition, the Board requires Live Scan fingerprinting in order to check each applicant's background for any criminal history. California law prohibits registered sex offenders from becoming licensed psychologists. National reporting data banks are also checked to make sure each applicant has no license disciplinary action in any other state.

Although the psychology license is generic and encompasses all areas of psychological practice (for example, psychological testing, biofeedback, child-custody evaluations, neuropsychology, hypnosis and psychotherapy), psychologists must have the appropriate education, training and experience to provide specialized services. California has ensured ongoing quality control for psychologists by requiring licensees to complete 36 hours of continuing education every two years. This continuing education must meet strict guidelines so psychologists are constantly updated on the latest research, laws, ethics, assessment and treatment techniques and approaches.



## How Do You Choose a Psychologist?

It is important to take time to select the right psychologist. First, clarify who needs psychological services—yourself, your children, your family, etc. Second, decide what area you want help with—substance abuse, eating disorders, depression, anxiety, etc. Then look for a psychologist trained and experienced to provide those services. Ask friends or relatives for recommendations. Check with your health insurance company for a list of authorized providers in your area. Your primary care physician can often assist you. Obtain referrals by calling or visiting the websites of the national or state psychological associations noted at the end of this booklet. When you have a list of possible psychologists, you can narrow it down by asking yourself if there are any characteristics in a psychologist that may increase your comfort level (for example, whether the psychologist is male or female, old or young, from a particular ethnic or religious group, etc.).

Next, check each psychologist's license status by calling the Board of Psychology at (916) 574-7720 or by checking the license status on the Board's website ([www.psychology.ca.gov](http://www.psychology.ca.gov)). Just click on the "License Verification" link. The Board strongly recommends that you choose a licensed psychologist. A license ensures the psychologist has met stringent educational and experience standards and passed comprehensive examinations. It also ensures he or she has passed a criminal background check.

It is important to verify the psychologist has a current, valid license. This means he or she is up to date on continuing education requirements and can legally practice. What's more, a current license is required for your insurance company to accept the psychologist as a valid provider.

If a consumer complaint has resulted in action against the psychologist, you can find out more information by checking the Board's website at [www.psychology.ca.gov](http://www.psychology.ca.gov) and clicking on "License

Verification.” You can often view the disciplinary documents through a link under the licensee’s name and description of the action to obtain more details on why discipline was imposed and about any limitations on the psychologist’s practice. Or you can request a copy of the disciplinary documents be mailed to you by calling the Board’s Enforcement Program at (866) 503-3221 or by e-mailing the Board at [bopmail@dca.ca.gov](mailto:bopmail@dca.ca.gov). You should know that unsubstantiated consumer complaint information is not public. Only complaints that result in filed Accusations or in formal Board disciplinary actions can be disclosed to the public.

The next step in the selection process is to make appointments to meet with the psychologists you are considering. Clarify whether there is a fee for this initial interview at the time you call for the appointment.

The Board recommends that you interview psychologist candidates just as you would anyone else you were considering for an important personal service.



## **You may want to ask:**

- » From which university or school the doctorate degree was earned.
- » When the degree was earned and the areas of specialized study.
- » If the psychologist is board-certified by the American Board of Professional Psychology—this credential is not necessary for independent practice, but does verify additional qualifications.
- » How much experience the psychologist has in dealing with issues similar to yours.
- » The approximate length of time the treatment is expected to take.
- » If the psychologist prefers working with a particular age group, gender, or ethnicity.
- » If the psychologist has published articles in his or her specialty areas.
- » If he or she has experience providing court testimony as an expert witness (forensic experience).
- » Whether it is possible that you may need drug therapy from a psychiatrist or other physician in conjunction with your psychotherapy and whether the psychologist can refer you to an appropriate physician.
- » If the psychologist can accommodate your schedule for therapy.

Turn to the Patients' Bill of Rights on page 4 for other topics you may want to cover when interviewing a psychologist.

# Can You Get Help From Someone Other Than a Psychologist?

When considering treatment, there are many options available. The profession of psychology is unique in many ways, but there are other professionals who provide similar services:

**Psychological Assistants:** These are professionals registered by the Board of Psychology—(916) 574-7720 or [www.psychology.ca.gov](http://www.psychology.ca.gov)—and authorized to provide limited psychological services only under the direct supervision of a licensed psychologist or a board-certified psychiatrist. Usually these individuals are earning hours of supervised professional experience toward meeting licensing requirements. They must have at least a Master’s degree in psychology and are not allowed to prescribe drugs. Their services normally are less expensive than those of psychologists.

**Registered Psychologists:** These are professionals registered by the Board of Psychology—(916) 574-7720 or [www.psychology.ca.gov](http://www.psychology.ca.gov)—to work at nonprofit community agencies that receive at least 25 percent of their funding through some government source. They must have doctorate degrees in psychology and have completed at least one year of supervised professional experience. They are not allowed to prescribe drugs, and their services are normally less expensive than those of psychologists.

**Psychiatrists:** These are physicians licensed by the Medical Board of California—(800) 633-2322 or (916) 263-2382 or [www.mbc.ca.gov](http://www.mbc.ca.gov). They must have doctorate degrees in medicine, serve four-year residencies, pass the California State Board examination and be board-certified in psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. They are authorized to prescribe drugs. Their services normally are more expensive than those of psychologists.

**Marriage and Family Therapists:** These are professionals licensed by the Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS)—(916) 574-7830 or [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov). They must have at least Master’s degrees, some may have doctorate degrees, serve a two-year internship and pass the BBS’s written examinations. They can provide counseling regarding marriage, family and relationship issues. They cannot prescribe drugs and have limitations in doing psychological testing. Their services normally are less expensive than those of psychologists.

**Clinical Social Workers:** These are professionals licensed by the Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS)—(916) 574-7830 or [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov). They must have at least Master’s degrees, some may have doctorate degrees and 3,200 hours of supervised experience and pass the BBS’s examinations. They use psychotherapeutic techniques, among other services, with individuals, couples, families and groups to improve clients’ quality of life. They cannot prescribe drugs and typically their services are less expensive than psychologists.



**Educational Psychologists:** These are professionals licensed by the Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS)—(916) 574-7830 or [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov). They must have at least Master’s degrees, some

may have doctorate degrees, have three years of experience as school psychologists and pass BBS's written examination. They can work in schools or in private practice and provide educational counseling services such as aptitude and achievement testing. They cannot do psychological testing unrelated to educational services and they cannot prescribe drugs. Their services normally are less expensive than those of psychologists.

**Psychiatric Technicians:** These are professionals licensed by the Board of Vocational Nursing & Psychiatric Technicians—(916) 263-7800 or [www.bvnpt.ca.gov](http://www.bvnpt.ca.gov). They must have graduated from a qualifying psychiatric technician program and pass a written examination. They practice under the direction of a licensed physician, psychologist, rehabilitation therapist, social worker, registered nurse or other professional personnel and are not permitted to practice independently. They offer services at state hospitals, day treatment/development centers, correctional facilities, psychiatric hospitals, vocational training centers and residential-care facilities. They can neither prescribe drugs nor do psychological testing. Their services normally are less expensive than those of psychologists.

**Priests, Ministers, Rabbis or Other Members of the Clergy:** These are unlicensed individuals and must be duly ordained members of the recognized clergy. They may provide spiritual guidance, but may not treat emotional or mental disorders, do psychological testing or prescribe drugs. Members of the recognized clergy cannot practice independently and can only function under the purview of their recognized church.

**Self-Help and Peer-Support Groups:** These are groups of unlicensed individuals who have similar problems and meet to discuss possible solutions. The groups may or may not be led by a licensed mental-health professional. You can locate such groups online or by asking a licensed mental health professional. There is usually no fee or just a nominal fee for these groups.

# What Happens During an Individual or Group Therapy Session?

## Individual Therapy:

During the first session, your psychologist will gather information about your personal, intellectual and emotional history and relationships. This information aids the psychologist in determining which strategies may be most helpful to you. Once your issues are clarified, you and the psychologist will outline goals. The process may include learning new problem-solving or coping skills, increasing self-understanding and self-confidence, exploring life patterns, and having a better sense of how you may be influenced by your surroundings and experiences.

It is important to think about what you would like to gain from psychotherapy. Take time before each session to think about what you want to accomplish during that meeting. As psychotherapy progresses, new goals may be established. This process is for you, so actively decide how to use the time. As issues or feelings (either positive or negative) come up during a session, you may want to share them with your psychologist. The basis of all good psychotherapy is trust. Your psychologist will listen and discuss your thoughts and feelings with you, so you can understand them more fully.

## Group Therapy:

In group psychotherapy, you are able to gain immediate feedback from fellow group members and the group psychologist. One of the most rewarding aspects of being in such a group is learning from others. By knowing how others perceive you, you can increase your self-awareness and focus on the aspects of your life you wish to change. You also can increase self-awareness by examining your response to the feelings of others and their experiences.

Group psychology also gives you an opportunity to try out new

behaviors, to express feelings you may have been hesitant to express, to assert yourself in new ways, and to experiment with new ideas. As you experience trust and security in the group, you may feel more free to take



risks. You may need to determine how active and involved you want to be—what your comfort level is. Being active means expressing your reactions to what other people are saying or doing, sharing your concerns, listening to another person, asking for clarification when you don't understand, giving support and comfort, and seeking support yourself. It is unrealistic to expect that you will be verbally active during every session. Sometimes you may feel more reflective than active, preferring to listen and to consider what other group members are saying.

## Treatment Over the Internet or by Phone

Those who provide psychotherapy or counseling on the Internet or by phone are required by law to be licensed. Licensing requirements vary by state, but individuals who provide psychotherapy to California residents are required to be licensed in California. Such licensure allows consumers to pursue recourse against the licensee should the consumer believe the licensee engaged in unprofessional conduct.

It is best to be a cautious consumer when considering psychological services over the Internet or by phone. Be sure you verify that the psychologist has a current and valid California license, and make sure you understand the fee that you will be charged for the services to be rendered—how and to whom the fee is to be paid. Be



sure you are confident that any communications with a psychologist will be confidential, and be aware of the risks and benefits of receiving services over the Internet or by phone so that you can make an informed choice about the therapy to be provided.

It is important you keep in mind that services provided on the Internet or by phone lack key components of traditional psychotherapy such as face-to-face interaction between the psychologist and patient so that body language and facial expressions can be components of therapy. More information on services over the Internet or by phone is available at the Board of Psychology website ([www.psychology.ca.gov](http://www.psychology.ca.gov)) under “Consumer Information” after clicking on the “Consumers” tab.

## What Psychologists Are NOT Supposed to Do

While the majority of psychologists are highly professional and ethical, it is good to remember that—as happens in other professions—some may bend or break the rules. If they break the rules, psychologists can directly or indirectly cause harm to patients. Following are examples of what psychologists (including psychological assistants and registered psychologists) should not do.

Psychologists should NEVER:

- » Have any type of sexual contact with a current patient, a relative or significant other of a current patient, or a former patient within two years after termination of therapy. This would include inappropriate touching, kissing and sexual intercourse. This type of behavior is never appropriate, and it is cause for mandatory revocation of the psychologist’s license.
- » Violate a patient’s confidentiality. Except for rare situations that your psychologist should explain to you,

a psychologist should never tell anyone what transpires during your therapy sessions or even the fact that you are a patient without your written permission. Confidentiality is the cornerstone of successful therapy, and it instills a sense of trust in the therapist-patient relationship.

- » Provide services for which they have no training, experience and education. Although the psychologist license is generic and authorizes all areas of practice, it is unprofessional conduct for a psychologist to practice outside his or her particular field of competence.
- » Abuse drugs. It is illegal for a psychologist to use any controlled substance, dangerous drug or alcoholic beverage in a manner that endangers either the psychologist or others or impairs his or her ability to practice safely.
- » Commit fraud or other crimes. Psychologists cannot overbill your insurance company in order to reimburse you for your co-payment, nor can they bill for services not performed in order to reduce the amount that you owe. If psychologists commit crimes that are related in any way to their practice, their licenses are subject to Board discipline.
- » Advertise falsely. Psychologists can only advertise that they provide services for which they are educated, experienced and trained. An advertised service or fee must actually be available.
- » Pay or accept compensation for referral of patients. It is a conflict of interest and a cause for discipline for psychologists to be paid for patient referrals. Referrals must be made objectively without regard to personal gain and by considering only the patient's best interests.

- » Act in an unprofessional, unethical or negligent manner. Psychologists must practice within the parameters defined in California law and the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct.
- » Assist someone in the unlicensed practice of psychology. It is always illegal for a psychologist to aid in the commission of any crime, especially a crime that could cause extreme harm to the public when untrained, unlicensed individuals practice psychology. This occurs most often when a psychologist allows an unlicensed person to provide services in his or her office without being properly registered or supervised.
- » Focus therapy on their own problems rather than on those of the patient. It is unprofessional for a psychologist to use therapy time that you are paying for to discuss his or her own personal problems.
- » Serve in improper multiple roles that impair their judgment. An improper multiple-role relationship occurs when a therapist engages in a second relationship with a client (or someone close to the client) and the secondary relationship risks compromising the therapist's objectivity and/or exploitation or harm of the client. Examples of multiple-role relationships that may be improper include employing patients, socializing with patients, and dating a patient's parent.
- » Abandon their patients. Psychologists may be disciplined by the Board of Psychology if they abandon a patient. Except under very rare circumstances, if your treatment is terminated abruptly and you still require treatment, your psychologist is required to provide you with the names and phone numbers of other practitioners who have the appropriate education, training and experience to take you on as a patient and continue your treatment.

# What Are Your Options If the Services Provided to You Are Unsatisfactory?

## How do You File a Complaint?

If you think that your psychologist was unprofessional, violated your rights or caused you harm, you can file a complaint by calling the Board of Psychology at (866) 503-3221.

If you would like to write a letter, direct it to: Board of Psychology, 1625 North Market Blvd., Ste. N-215, Sacramento, CA 95834. Or you can visit the Board's website at [www.psychology.ca.gov](http://www.psychology.ca.gov) to file a complaint online against a psychologist. For more information, e-mail the Board at [bopmail@dca.ca.gov](mailto:bopmail@dca.ca.gov).

Board staff can tell you how to file your complaint and will refer you to other agencies if necessary. The Board has the authority to take formal disciplinary action against a psychologist's license (for example, revocation, suspension, probation, etc.) or to issue a citation and fine. Please note that the Board's authority is limited by a statute of limitations to violations that occurred within three years of discovery by the Board, or within seven years from the date of the act or omission, whichever occurs first.

The most effective



complaints are those that contain firsthand, verifiable information. While anonymous complaints will be reviewed, it may be impossible to pursue them unless they contain documented evidence of the allegations (such as video or audio tapes, photographs or written documents). You will be asked to provide any documented evidence you have about your complaint.

## What Happens When You File a Complaint Against a Psychologist?

When you file a complaint against a psychologist, psychological assistant or registered psychologist, you eventually will be asked to put your complaint in writing. The Board will need specific information such as the names, addresses and phone numbers of both the complainant (you) and the psychologist, as well as a detailed account of the alleged unprofessional or illegal conduct. You will need to sign a release form that authorizes the Board to obtain patient records and to talk to the psychologist about your complaint. If a preliminary review of your complaint indicates that a violation of law may have occurred, your complaint will be forwarded on to an investigator. You may be interviewed by the investigator regarding your complaint. On rare occasions, you may need to testify at an administrative hearing if the Board files formal charges against the psychologist based on your complaint. This would only happen if the Board and the psychologist cannot agree on settlement terms.

In most cases where formal charges are filed, the psychologist waives a formal hearing and agrees to settlement terms.

## How Are Complaints Processed?

The Board receives complaints concerning many different licensees, professional issues and situations. Within 10 days after receipt of your complaint, the Board will notify you that your complaint was received. Complaints are reviewed daily. Some complaints regarding minor violations that do not warrant formal disciplinary action are dealt with through a variety of nondisciplinary methods. These may include direct mediation between the parties involved, citations and fines, educational letters, or cease and desist orders.

If a complaint warrants formal investigation, it is referred to the Department of Consumer Affairs' Division of Investigation. Investigators are trained peace officers. At this point, as the complainant, you would be notified that your complaint was referred for formal investigation. When your case goes forward to investigation, an investigator may interview you. The psychologist is then usually offered an opportunity to respond to the allegations in an interview with the investigator. It should be noted that complaint and investigation information is considered confidential at this point, not a matter of public record. The law prohibits a psychologist from harassing you for filing a complaint.

Once an investigation is completed, an expert case consultant will review the entire investigation file to determine whether a violation of law may have occurred. If the expert finds a possible violation, the case is submitted to the California Department of Justice, Office of the Attorney General. A Deputy Attorney General acts as the Executive Officer's attorney and will review the case to determine whether there is sufficient evidence to support the filing of formal charges. Then you would be notified that your complaint was referred to the Office of the Attorney General for administrative action.

If your case is accepted by the Office of the Attorney General, a document called an “Accusation” is drafted by the Deputy Attorney General and signed by the Board’s Executive Officer. You would receive a copy of the Accusation, which is the first public document in the disciplinary process. It is important to note that only initials are used to identify complainants in Accusations, so you don’t need to worry that your name will be a matter of public record.

If an informal settlement agreement cannot be reached between the psychologist and the Board, an administrative hearing would take place. The Board encourages negotiated settlements because they eliminate the need for costly administrative hearings and protect consumers by imposing disciplinary action sooner. To this end, the Board has adopted Disciplinary Guidelines designed to set forth the Board’s penalty standards. You may contact the Board for a free copy of the Disciplinary Guidelines or download them on the Board’s website ([www.psychology.ca.gov](http://www.psychology.ca.gov)). Click on “Forms/Pubs” to access the guidelines. If a hearing is held, the Board must demonstrate “by clear and convincing evidence to a reasonable certainty” that the allegations are true. For that reason, it is generally necessary for the complainant to testify in person at the hearing.

In the event that a hearing must take place, an Administrative Law Judge presides over the hearing. When the hearing is completed, the judge will issue a “Proposed Decision” stating the findings (facts that were proven at the hearing) and will offer a recommendation for resolution of the case (e.g., license revocation, suspension, probation, dismissal). The judge uses the Board’s Disciplinary Guidelines in formulating the Proposed Decision. The Proposed Decision is distributed to Board of Psychology members for vote. If the Board votes in favor of the Proposed Decision, it becomes the Final Decision. If the Board votes not to adopt the Proposed Decision, the hearing transcript is circulated among Board members, written arguments are solicited from the defense counsel and the Office of the Attorney General, and the Board

subsequently issues its own Final Decision. Final Decisions are matters of public record and are available upon request. The complainant would be sent a copy.

This “procedural due process” can take more than a year from the time a complaint is filed until the time that a final decision is made.



## Should Unlicensed Practice Be Reported to the Board?

If you believe that an unlicensed person is engaging in activities for which a psychologist license is required, you should report such activity to the Board. The Board will investigate allegations of unlicensed practice and, if sufficient evidence is found, will forward the information to the local District Attorney’s Office for criminal prosecution. The Board does not have the authority to criminally prosecute. Such action must be conducted by the local District Attorney. However, the Board may also issue a citation and fine for unlicensed practice.



## Are Psychologists Required to Report Unprofessional Conduct by Colleagues?

This question is most often raised by psychologists after a patient informs them of a sexual relationship with a previous therapist.

All psychotherapists who are advised by a patient of sexual involvement with another therapist are required by law to give that patient the pamphlet titled “Professional Therapy NEVER Includes Sex.” This pamphlet outlines that it is illegal for a therapist to have sex with a patient (or with a former patient within two years after the termination of therapy) and to explain the options available. You can contact the Board by telephone at (916) 574-7720 for a free copy of the pamphlet or you can download it from the Board’s website ([www.psychology.ca.gov](http://www.psychology.ca.gov)). Just click on “Consumers” to access the pamphlet.

Psychologists, however, are not legally required to report misconduct by colleagues. Complaints of a more egregious nature (such as sexual misconduct) require the victim to make a complaint. Doctor-patient confidentiality laws make it impossible for a psychologist to file a complaint on behalf of a patient unless the patient has given written authorization or the patient is a minor.

## Where Else Can You Turn to Discuss Your Situation?

If you think your psychologist was unprofessional, violated your rights or caused you harm, you may also find it helpful to discuss your situation with one or more of the following individuals:

- » A trustworthy family member or friend.
- » A family physician or other qualified health professional.
- » A priest, minister, rabbi or other member of the clergy.

Depending on the nature and severity of your complaint, you may wish to:

- » File a complaint with your local police department or district attorney.
- » Consult an attorney and file a civil lawsuit.
- » File a complaint with the ethics committee of the:

American Psychological Association

750 First Street, NE

Washington, DC 20002-4242

(202) 336-5500

[www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)

## What Can a Consumer Access on the Board’s Website?

The California Board of Psychology maintains an array of online resources that can assist you in evaluating a psychologist or learning more about psychological treatment. Here’s a summary of the consumer information available at [www.psychology.ca.gov](http://www.psychology.ca.gov):

- » Consumer information—click on “Consumer Information”
- » Verification of licensure or registration—click on “License Verification”
- » Disciplinary action against licensees/registrants—click on “Consumers” and then on “Disciplinary Actions”
- » Contact information for the Board’s staff—click on “Contact Us”



- » Publications—click on “Forms/Pubs” and select from a list that includes the brochure, “Professional Therapy NEVER Includes Sex,” the Board’s “Disciplinary Guidelines,” the Board’s laws and regulations and all of the Board’s past newsletters
- » Press releases—click on “Forms/Pubs” and then on “Press Releases”
- » Complaint information and complaint form to download or file online—click on “Filing a Complaint with the Board of Psychology”
- » E-mail contact with the Board—click on “Contact Us” then on “E-mail Us”
- » Board meeting agendas and meeting minutes—click on “Board Meetings”
- » Evaluation forms to assess the service you receive from the Board—click on “Consumers” and then on “Customer Service Evaluation”



## Quick Recap of Psychology Resources

Verify a psychologist is licensed: Check license status by calling the Board of Psychology License at (916) 574-7720 or by checking the license status on the Board’s website ([www.psychology.ca.gov](http://www.psychology.ca.gov)). Just click on the “License Verification” link.

Verify a psychiatrist is licensed: Check license status by calling the Medical Board of California License Verification Unit at (916) 263-2382 or by checking the license status yourself on the Board’s website ([www.MBC.ca.gov](http://www.MBC.ca.gov)). Just click the “Verify a License” link.

Verify license status for marriage and family therapists, social workers or educational psychologists: Check license status by calling the Board of Behavioral Sciences at (916) 574-5830 or by checking the status yourself on the Board’s website ([www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov)). Just click on the “License Verification” link.

Psychological Assistants: These are professionals registered by the Board of Psychology—(916) 574-7720 or [www.psychology.ca.gov](http://www.psychology.ca.gov).

Registered Psychologists: These are professionals registered by the Board of Psychology—(916) 574-7720 or [www.psychology.ca.gov](http://www.psychology.ca.gov).

Psychiatric Technicians: These are professionals licensed by the Board of Vocational Nursing & Psychiatric Technicians—(916) 263-7800 or [www.bvnpt.ca.gov](http://www.bvnpt.ca.gov).

## Acknowledgment

The California Board of Psychology protects consumers of psychological services by ensuring high standards for the practice of psychology. The Board establishes rigorous licensing qualifications, investigates patient complaints and reaches out to empower consumers with information and resources.

The Board of Psychology thanks those who took the time to review this consumer brochure during its development. Your valuable input has helped ensure that this booklet provides high-quality and useful information and guidance to the public.

## How to Obtain Additional Copies

Single copies of this Consumer Guide to Psychology Services are available at no charge from either of the following sources:

California Board of Psychology  
1625 North Market Blvd., Ste. N-215  
Sacramento, CA 95834  
(916) 574-7720

Office of Publications, Design & Editing  
California Department of Consumer Affairs  
(866) 320-8652





1625 North Market Blvd, Suite N-215  
Sacramento, CA 95834

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