

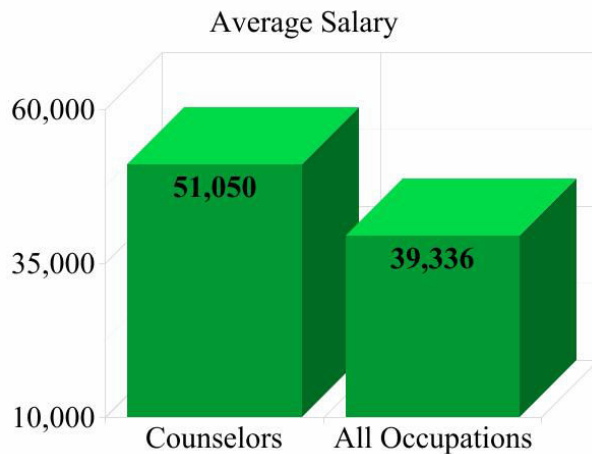
Counselors

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WHAT THEY DO

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

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.

EDUCATION REQUIRED

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.

Counselors - Continued

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OTHER USEFUL SKILLS

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.

HOW TO ADVANCE

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.

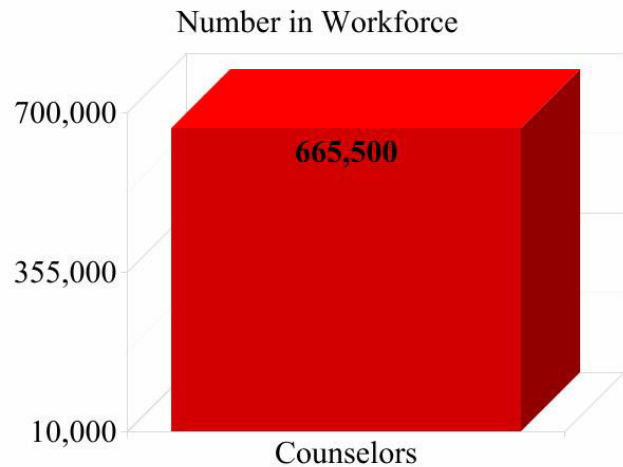
Prospects for advancement vary by counseling field. School counselors can become directors or supervisors of counseling, guidance, or pupil personnel services; or, usually with further graduate education, they may become counselor educators, counseling psychologists, or school administrators. Some counselors 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.

JOB GROWTH

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.