Careers in Psychology: Marriage and Family Therapy

Marriage and family therapists believe that an individual’s functioning is directly related to how his or her family unit functions. These therapists believe that individual problems do not develop in isolation. Instead, they emphasize that how family functioning and family relationships are directly related to the psychological functioning of all members of that unit. Marriage and family therapists want to learn how the roles of each family member have affected the patterns and development of all members within the family.

**Job Description**

Marriage and family therapists work in many settings and with a diverse client population. Clients treated by marriage and family therapists can include families who are impacted by severe mental illness (e.g., schizophrenia), sexual abuse victims and their families, conduct-disordered youth and their families, and juvenile offenders and their families.

Marriage and family therapists approach therapy from a holistic perspective. Marriage and family therapists are not concerned with simply “fixing” the problem. Rather, they are concerned with the overall health of the family and how treatment might impact family functioning. Marriage and family therapists often provide brief, solution-focused therapy. According to the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, therapists see clients an average of twelve sessions, with approximately 66% of cases terminating within twenty sessions.

**Educational Requirements**

Forty-six states licensed marriage and family therapists as of 2003, which means that insurance companies can reimburse them for their services. As with other mental health professions, marriage and family therapists typically need a master’s or doctoral degree to work independently in their field. Students can obtain a master’s degree directly in marriage and family therapy, or they can obtain a master’s in a related field such as psychology or social work. Students who go the latter route can then study marriage and family therapy in depth at an accredited post-graduate degree program that provides training in this field.

For more information about marriage and family therapy, go to [www.aamft.org](http://www.aamft.org)

Go to [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org) for career information from the American Psychological Association. Click into “Students” and “Considering a Career in Psychology?”

For more information about graduate programs in psychology, see *Graduate Study in Psychology* (updated frequently). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association. This book describes graduate programs in all fields of psychology, with information about admission requirements. Ask for it at the reference desk in the library.