



FROM THE MIC TO THE COMMUNITY

A PODCAST COMPANION

# Before You Become a Therapist

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A practical starting point before you choose a program, borrow money, or change careers.

READ / LISTEN / REFLECT

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## EXPLORING THE PROFESSION

# Begin where you are.

Use this guide to compare a professional path, the training it requires, and its practical demands. Leave with a clearer question and one informed next step.

## Listen alongside this guide

Conversations from The Holistic Counselor Podcast to explore with these pages.

## EPISODE 1

### Diana's journey and the questions behind the podcast

Diana talks about entering counseling, community mental health work, and the uncertainty of the early years. Use it alongside your informational interviews.

[Listen or read the transcript](#)

## EPISODE 129

### Money beliefs and changing careers with Dr. Oliver Schnusenberg

Dr. Oliver Schnusenberg describes pursuing counseling training after a finance career. Use the conversation to consider timing and money beliefs, then check the practical plan for your own life.

[Listen or read the transcript](#)

## IN THESE PAGES

A note from Diana / Choose the path before the program. / Price the whole transition. / Find out what the work feels like. / Ask what you bring to the room. / Make the next decision a small one.

## EXPLORING THE PROFESSION

# A note from Diana

Looking back, I wish I had understood sooner how important it was to do my own therapeutic work and examine why I wanted to become a therapist. I also wish I had looked more closely at the investment and the working conditions that came with the profession.

Today, I make decisions about client work, this podcast, resources, and family with my bandwidth in mind. I want you to have room to ask those questions early, while you are still deciding what fits your life.

Use this guide to compare a professional path, the training it requires, and its practical demands. Leave with a clearer question and one informed next step.

For U.S. students and career changers exploring clinical mental health work.

## OPTIONAL CHRISTIAN REFLECTION

My Christian faith shapes how I understand my work. If this perspective fits you, consider: How can I explore a sense of calling while being honest about my preparation, limits, and responsibilities? You can skip this section and use every practical part of the guide.

## EPISODE 23

## Faith and professional boundaries

Whitney Owens and Diana discuss faith in practice, including client choice. This optional listening complements personal reflection; spiritual approaches should respect the client's perspective.

[Listen or read the transcript](#)

EXPLORING THE PROFESSION

# Choose the path before the program.

Several professions provide therapy. Start with the work you want to do and the place you expect to practice. Then investigate the degree, supervised experience, examination, and license for that profession. The degree-to-license connection is worth understanding before you enroll.

| Possible path                                          | Typical preparation in the U.S.                                                                                    |
|--------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mental health counselor<br>LMHC / LPC and other titles | Relevant master's degree, clinical training, and state licensure requirements. [1]                                 |
| Clinical social worker<br>LCSW and other titles        | MSW, supervised clinical experience, and licensure. Social work also includes nonclinical careers. [2]             |
| Marriage and family therapist<br>LMFT                  | Relevant master's degree, supervised clinical experience, and licensure, with a relational and systems focus. [3]  |
| Clinical / counseling psychologist                     | Usually a PhD or PsyD, clinical training, and licensure. Other psychology specialties have different pathways. [4] |

## Ask the program and check with the regulator

Which license does this exact degree prepare me to seek in my intended state? Ask for its written licensure disclosure, accreditation details, placement requirements, and any limits involving location or delivery format. Accreditation does not itself make a graduate licensed. For a Florida LMHC path, use the Florida Board's requirements. [5, 8]

A move across states or training completed outside the U.S. needs its own credential review. Coaching, pastoral support, and peer support have different roles; a short course is not a clinical license.

EXPLORING THE PROFESSION

# Price the whole transition.

Compare written program estimates with your household budget and current local job postings. Ask for pay and benefit information at the prelicensed stage as well as after licensure. An advertised session fee is not take-home pay.

| Cost or constraint | Question to ask                                                            |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Education          | What is the total tuition plus mandatory fees, books, and travel?          |
| Placements         | Who finds the site? Are hours paid? When must I be available?              |
| Living costs       | What happens to income, insurance, childcare, and loan payments?           |
| After graduation   | Who pays for supervision, applications, exams, and insurance?              |
| Delays             | What is the backup plan if a placement falls through or hours take longer? |

## EXPLORING THE PROFESSION

# Make room for the transition

## Use a simple gap estimate

Monthly essential costs + training costs due that month - reliable available income = the amount you still need to cover. Count grants or other nonrepayable support only when confirmed. Borrowing can cover a gap but creates a repayment obligation.

Put the busiest placement term on an actual weekly calendar: class, study, clinical hours, supervision, paid work, commuting, caregiving, and rest. Ask students currently in the program whether that schedule is realistic.

The ACA workforce survey documents compensation and debt concerns among respondents. It is useful context, not a prediction of your earnings. The survey is broader than students or Florida interns. [7]

## EPISODE 61

## Money, boundaries, and burnout with Laura Long

Laura Long and Diana discuss the financial and emotional sides of the work. Bring the questions it raises into your budget and informational interviews.

[Listen or read the transcript](#)

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**EXPLORING THE PROFESSION**

# Find out what the work feels like.

Arrange informational conversations with clinicians in two different settings and a recent graduate if possible. Ask about the whole week. Do not request access to client sessions, records, or identifiable stories as part of career exploration.

## **What fills your time outside sessions?**

Ask about documentation, consultation, preparation, meetings, billing, and required training. Which parts did you underestimate?

## **What support did you receive when you were new?**

Who helped with difficult decisions during the workday? Were there opportunities to observe or practice skills within approved training arrangements?

## **How are workload and compensation connected?**

Ask about salary versus session-based pay, benefits, cancellations, administrative time, and how a caseload grows. A picture of typical months, including quieter ones, is especially helpful.

## **What happens when a clinician needs help?**

How are unfamiliar cases, workload concerns, and disagreements handled? Ask for an example of support without requesting private client information.

## **What would you ask before choosing this program or job?**

Listen for practical details you can verify. One person's experience is a perspective, so compare more than one account.

## EXPLORING THE PROFESSION

# Ask what you bring to the room.

Being a person others confide in can spark an interest in this work. Clinical practice also asks you to tolerate uncertainty, accept feedback, respect differences, and notice when your own needs enter the conversation.

## My lesson about personal work

I wish I had understood the value of doing my own therapeutic work earlier. For your own planning, consider where you can examine your patterns and get support. Personal growth continues throughout a career. You can reflect on the support you need without recording private history here.

## EPISODE 11

## Cultural humility and entering the profession

Dr. Dorothy Chatelier-Orelus and Diana discuss entering the field and understanding people in context. Content note: the episode includes a disturbing account of serious self-harm.

[Listen or read the transcript](#)

## EPISODE 87

## Culture and crossing borders with Lidiana Cartolano

Lidiana Cartolano discusses immigration and her professional path. Her story can help you frame questions; the receiving licensing board determines your own requirements.

[Listen or read the transcript](#)

## EPISODE 79

## Learning and family support with Meiby Nodarse

Meiby Nodarse discusses her graduate placement at 4KIDS. Listen for how her interests connected with a setting; current placement opportunities can be checked with the organization.

[Listen or read the transcript](#)

## EXPLORING THE PROFESSION

# Make room for your own reflection

Type in the spaces below, or print and write by hand.

**What interests me about the everyday responsibilities of a therapist?**

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**When do I feel an urge to rescue, convince, or be needed?**

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**How do I respond when someone sees the world differently or challenges my thinking?**

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**What would help me receive feedback and recognize my limits?**

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**What time, income, relationships, and rest do I need to protect?**

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These questions are for your own reflection. You can use a private notebook; the website does not collect your answers. Professional learning includes examining personal values without imposing them on clients. [6]

EXPLORING THE PROFESSION

# Make the next decision a small one.

You do not need to decide your entire career today. Choose the next step that will give you information you do not yet have.

| If this is still unclear... | Try this next                                                                               |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The professional path       | Interview someone in each of your two leading professions.                                  |
| The training or cost        | Request written program details and map one placement term.                                 |
| Whether the work fits       | Arrange an informational interview or a formally supervised support role with clear duties. |

My next action, the answer I need, and when I will follow up:

## EXPLORING THE PROFESSION

# Sources and further reading

Editorial revision: October 13, 2026. The linked authorities provide current rules, services, and evidence.

1. [BLS: mental health counselors](#)
2. [BLS: clinical social work](#)
3. [BLS: marriage and family therapists](#)
4. [BLS: psychologists](#)
5. [Florida Board: mental health counselor requirements](#)
6. [ACA: current ethics code and resources](#)
7. [ACA: 2024 Counseling Workforce Survey](#)
8. [CACREP: program search and student resources](#)

**ABOUT THIS GUIDE**

For education and career planning. This guide does not provide individual legal advice, clinical supervision, or therapy, and using it does not create a professional relationship with Diana. Check current requirements with the relevant licensing board. It awards no supervision hours or continuing education credit.

[Read the full educational disclaimer](#)

## FROM THE MIC TO THE COMMUNITY

# Keep exploring.



Read, listen, and return  
at your own pace.

Scan for this guide and its episode links.

[theholisticcounselor.com/resources](https://theholisticcounselor.com/resources)

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