

OCCUPATIONAL OUTLOOK HANDBOOK

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Marriage and Family Therapists

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Summary



Job Outlook

Employment of marriage and family therapists is projected to grow 16 percent from 2023 to 2033, much faster than the average for all occupations.

About 7,500 openings for marriage and family therapists are projected each year, on average, over the decade. Many of those openings are expected to result from the need to replace workers who transfer to different occupations or exit the labor force, such as to retire.

State & Area Data

Explore resources for employment and wages by state and area for marriage and family therapists.

Similar Occupations

Compare the job duties, education, job growth, and pay of marriage and family therapists with similar occupations.

More Information, Including Links to O*NET

Learn more about marriage and family therapists by visiting additional resources, including O*NET, a source on key characteristics of workers and occupations.

What They Do ->

What Marriage and Family Therapists Do



Marriage and family therapists encourage clients to discuss their emotions and experiences.

Marriage and family therapists diagnose and treat cognitive, behavioral, or similar disorders in the context of couples and other relationships.

Duties

Marriage and family therapists typically do the following:

- Assess clients to identify their emotional, behavioral, and psychological needs
- Ask questions that encourage clients to discuss their emotions and experiences
- Help clients process their reactions and adjust to difficult changes that relate to marriage and family dynamics, such as divorce
- Create a treatment plan that helps clients develop coping strategies and decision-making skills
- Refer clients to other specialists, resources, or services in the community
- Complete and maintain confidential files and records

Marriage and family therapists work with individuals, couples, and families. Even when treating individuals, therapists focus on family systems. They evaluate family relationships and development to understand how these affect clients’ mental health. Treatment often involves addressing issues, such as low self-esteem and addiction, that impact clients’ relationships.

Marriage and family therapists assess each client’s situation and determine the best type, or types, of technique for treatment. They use a variety of techniques and tools to treat clients. For example, a therapist may apply cognitive behavioral therapy to help the client understand harmful thoughts, feelings, and beliefs and how to replace them with positive ones.

Therapists also have administrative duties, including maintaining records to document client visits. Those working in private practice must market their business to prospective clients, and they may need to follow up with insurance companies and clients to get payment for their services.

Marriage and family therapists coordinate client treatment with other specialists, such as [psychologists](#), [psychiatrists](#), and [social workers](#).

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[Work Environment ->](#)

Work Environment



Many marriage and family therapists work in private practice.

Marriage and family therapists held about 76,000 jobs in 2023. The largest employers of marriage and family therapists were as follows:

Offices of other health practitioners	28%
Individual and family services	27
Self-employed workers	14
Outpatient care centers	13
State government, excluding education and hospitals	6

Marriage and family therapists work in a variety of settings. In addition to those shown in the table, which include mental health centers and substance abuse treatment centers, their work settings include schools and hospitals.

Some marriage and family therapists offer telehealth options, in which they meet with clients by phone, video, or other virtual method.

Work Schedules

Most marriage and family therapists work full time, but part-time work is common. Some therapists work evenings and weekends to accommodate their clients’ schedules.

How to Become a Marriage and Family Therapist



Master's programs in marriage and family therapy prepare students to provide counseling to couples, individuals, and groups.

Marriage and family therapists typically need a master’s degree to enter the occupation. Every state requires therapists to be licensed.

Education

To enter the occupation, marriage and family therapists need a master’s degree in psychology, marriage and family therapy, or a related mental health field from an accredited school. Organizations that accredit these programs include the [Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs](#) (CACREP), the [Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education](#) (COAMFTE), and the [Masters in Psychology and Counseling Accreditation Council](#) (MPCAC).

Admissions requirements vary by program. Applicants may need to have completed specific coursework, such as counseling and statistics, or to have a bachelor’s degree in [psychology](#) or a related field.

Marriage and family therapy programs teach students about how marriages, families, and relationships function and how these relationships can affect mental and emotional health. Programs typically include a supervised practicum or internship where students gain experience working with clients.

Training

Candidates gain hands-on experience through postdegree supervised clinical work. During this training, they work under the supervision of a licensed counselor and learn to provide family therapy, group therapy, psychotherapy, and other therapeutic interventions directly to clients.

Licenses, Certifications, and Registrations

All states require marriage and family therapists to be licensed. Licensure requires a master’s degree and completion of a state-specified number of hours of postdegree supervised clinical experience. In addition, therapists must pass a state-recognized exam, such as that administered by the [Association of Marital and Family Therapy Regulatory Boards](#), and complete annual continuing education classes. Some states require passage of a jurisprudence exam.

Important Qualities

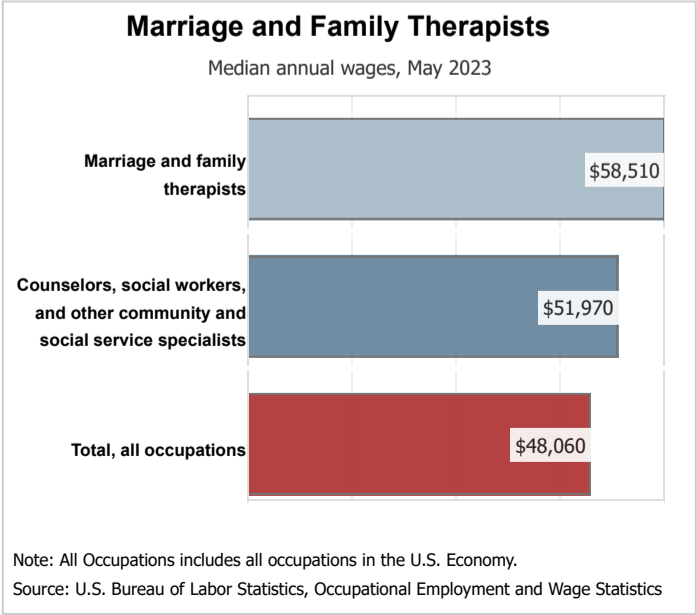
Communication skills. Marriage and family therapists need to effectively convey ideas and listen to clients. Because they instruct clients on improving communication, it is important that they model effective communication themselves.

Compassion. Marriage and family therapists often work with people who are dealing with stressful and difficult situations, so they must be able to empathize with their clients.

Interpersonal skills. Marriage and family therapists must be able to work effectively with different types of people. They need to develop a rapport when working with clients to help them feel comfortable.

Organizational skills. Marriage and family therapists need to maintain records of client interactions. Therapists in private practice also must keep track of payments and work with insurance companies.

Pay



The median annual wage for marriage and family therapists was \$58,510 in May 2023. The median wage is the wage at which half the workers in an occupation earned more than that amount and half earned less. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$39,090, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$104,710.

In May 2023, the median annual wages for marriage and family therapists in the top industries in which they worked were as follows:

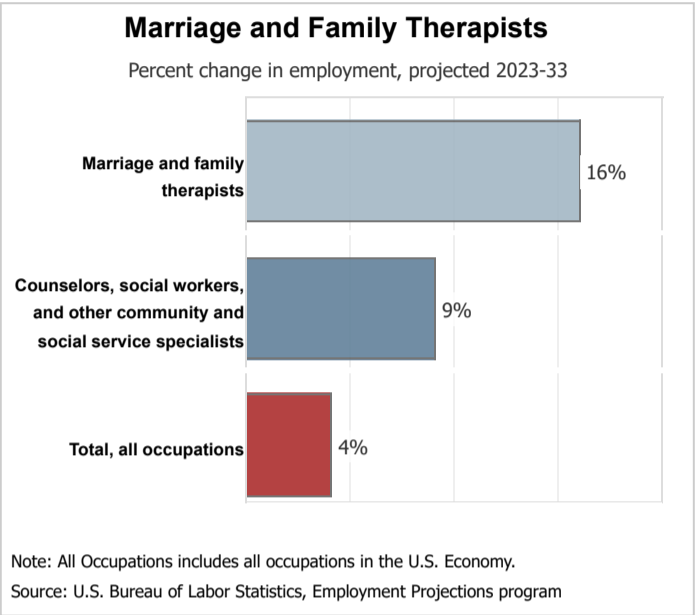
State government, excluding education and hospitals	\$86,030
Outpatient care centers	61,390
Individual and family services	50,700
Offices of other health practitioners	49,190

Most marriage and family therapists work full time, but part-time work is common. Some therapists work evenings and weekends to accommodate their clients’ schedules.

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[Job Outlook ->](#)

Job Outlook



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Employment

Growth is expected due to the increasing use of integrated care, which is a treatment of multiple problems at one time by a group of specialists. In providing integrated care, marriage and family therapists are working with counselors such as substance abuse, behavior disorder, and mental health counselors to address clients' issues as a team.

Employment projections data for marriage and family therapists, 2023-33

Marriage and family therapists

SOC Code:
21-1013

Employment, 2023:
76,000

Projected Employment, 2033:
88,200

Change, 2023-33 (Percent):
16

Change, 2023-33 (Numeric):
12,300

Employment By Industry:
[Get data](#)

SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

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[State & Area Data ->](#)

State & Area Data

Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics (OEWS)

The [Occupational Employment and Wage Statistics](#) (OEWS) program produces employment and wage estimates annually for over 800 occupations. These estimates are available for the nation as a whole, for individual states, and for metropolitan and nonmetropolitan areas. The link(s) below go to OEWS data maps for employment and wages by state and area.

[Marriage and family therapists](#)

Projections Central

Occupational employment projections are developed for all states by Labor Market Information (LMI) or individual state Employment Projections offices. All state projections data are available at www.projectionscentral.org . Information on this site allows projected employment growth for an occupation to be compared among states or to be compared within one state. In addition, states may produce projections for areas; there are links to each state’s websites where these data may be retrieved.

CareerOneStop

CareerOneStop includes hundreds of [occupational profiles](#) with data available by state and metro area. There are links in the left-hand side menu to compare occupational employment by state and occupational wages by local area or metro area. There is also a [salary info tool](#) to search for wages by zip code.

<- Job Outlook

Similar Occupations ->

Similar Occupations

This table shows a list of occupations with job duties that are similar to those of marriage and family therapists.

<p>Genetic Counselors</p> <p>Job Duties: Genetic counselors assess clients' risk for a variety of inherited conditions, such as birth defects.</p> <p>Entry-Level Education: Master's degree</p> <p>2023 Median Pay: \$95,770</p>
<p>Health Education Specialists</p> <p>Job Duties: Health education specialists develop programs to teach people about conditions affecting well-being.</p> <p>Entry-Level Education: Bachelor's degree</p> <p>2023 Median Pay: \$62,860</p>
<p>Physicians and Surgeons</p> <p>Job Duties: Physicians and surgeons diagnose and treat injuries or illnesses and address health maintenance.</p> <p>Entry-Level Education: Doctoral or professional degree</p> <p>2023 Median Pay: This wage is equal to or greater than \$239,200 per year.</p>
<p>Psychologists</p> <p>Job Duties: Psychologists study cognitive, emotional, and social processes and behavior by observing, interpreting, and recording how people relate to one another and to their environments.</p> <p>Entry-Level Education: See How to Become One</p> <p>2023 Median Pay: \$92,740</p>
<p>Rehabilitation Counselors</p> <p>Job Duties: Rehabilitation counselors help people with physical, mental, developmental, or emotional disabilities live independently.</p> <p>Entry-Level Education: Master's degree</p> <p>2023 Median Pay: \$44,040</p>
<p>School and Career Counselors and Advisors</p> <p>Job Duties: School counselors help students develop academic and social skills. Career counselors and advisors help people choose a path to employment.</p> <p>Entry-Level Education: Master's degree</p> <p>2023 Median Pay: \$61,710</p>
<p>Social and Community Service Managers</p> <p>Job Duties: Social and community service managers coordinate and supervise programs and organizations that support public well-being.</p> <p>Entry-Level Education: Bachelor's degree</p> <p>2023 Median Pay: \$77,030</p>
<p>Social and Human Service Assistants</p>

Job Duties:

Social and human service assistants provide client services in a variety of fields, such as psychology, rehabilitation, and social work.

Entry-Level Education:

High school diploma or equivalent

2023 Median Pay:

\$41,410

Social Workers

Job Duties:

Social workers help people prevent and cope with problems in their everyday lives.

Entry-Level Education:

[See How to Become One](#)

2023 Median Pay:

\$58,380

Substance Abuse, Behavioral Disorder, and Mental Health Counselors

Job Duties:

Substance abuse, behavioral disorder, and mental health counselors advise people on a range of issues, such as those relating to alcoholism, addictions, or depression.

Entry-Level Education:

Master's degree

2023 Median Pay:

\$53,710

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Contacts for More Information

For more information about accredited programs, visit

[Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education](#)

[Council for Accreditation of Counseling & Related Educational Programs](#)

[Masters in Psychology and Counseling Accreditation Council](#)

For more information about marriage and family therapists, visit

[American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy](#)

[Association of Marital and Family Therapy Regulatory Boards](#)

For general information about counseling and for information about counseling specialties, visit

[American Counseling Association](#)

For information about contacting state regulating boards, visit

[National Board for Certified Counselors](#)

O*NET

[Marriage and Family Therapists](#)

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SUGGESTED CITATION:

Bureau of Labor Statistics, U.S. Department of Labor, *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, Marriage and Family Therapists, at <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/marriage-and-family-therapists.htm> (visited *October 24, 2024*).

Last Modified Date: Thursday, August 29, 2024