

Psychologist (PhD or PsyD)

What they are: A doctoral-level mental health professional, not a medical doctor.

Education & training

- Bachelor's degree
- Doctorate (PhD or PsyD)
- Clinical internship and supervised practice

What they **can** do

- Diagnose mental health conditions
- Provide psychotherapy (talk therapy)
- Conduct psychological testing (IQ tests, personality assessments, learning disability evaluations)

What they **usually cannot** do

- Prescribe medication (very rare exceptions in a few locations with extra training)

Best known for

- Therapy and psychological testing
- Deep work on behavior, emotions, and thought patterns

Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP)

Also called: Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP)

These are the same role; PMHNP is the full, official title.

What they are: An advanced practice nurse specializing in mental health.

Education & training

- Bachelors in Nursing (BSN)
- Registered Nurse (RN) license
- Master's or Doctorate (MSN or DNP) as a PMHNP

What they **can** do

- Diagnose mental health conditions
- Prescribe psychiatric medications (independently in some states, with supervision in others)
- Provide therapy
- Manage ongoing treatment

Best known for

- Combining nursing and psychiatric care
- Often more therapy-focused than psychiatrists

Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)

What they are: A master's-level mental health professional with a social systems focus.

Education & training

- Bachelor's degree
- Master of Social Work (MSW)
- Supervised clinical hours + licensing exam

What they **can** do

- Provide therapy
- Diagnose mental health conditions
- Help with life stressors, relationships, trauma, and access to resources

What they **cannot** do

- Prescribe medication

Best known for

- Therapy plus practical support (school, family, community, resources)
- Strong focus on environment and relationships

Psychiatrist (MD or DO)

What they are: A medical doctor who specializes in mental health.

Education & training:

- Bachelor's degree
- Medical school (MD or DO)
- Residency in psychiatry (4 years)

What they **can** do

- Diagnose mental health conditions
- Prescribe all psychiatric medications
- Order and interpret medical tests
- Provide therapy (though many focus more on medication management)

Best known for

- Treating complex conditions
- Managing medications, especially when medical issues are involved

Quick Comparison Table

Role	Medical Doctor	Prescribes Medication	Provides Therapy
Psychologist (PhD/PsyD)	✗ No	✗ Usually no	✓ Yes
Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurse Practitioner (PMHNP)	✗ No	✓ Yes (state-dependent)	✓ Yes
Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)	✗ No	✗ No	✓ Yes
Psychiatrist (MD/DO)	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	✓ Sometimes