

*A Consumer Guide to Psychological Services*

For Your  
Peace of Mind



California  
Board of Psychology



# For Your Peace of Mind

## *A Consumer Guide to Psychological Services*

Published by  
California Board of Psychology  
1422 Howe Avenue, Suite 22  
Sacramento, CA 95825  
(916) 263-2699

**[www.psychboard.ca.gov](http://www.psychboard.ca.gov)**

© 2001 California Board of Psychology



**California  
Board of Psychology**

# Table of Contents

---

<b>Introduction: You're Not Alone</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>How Can a Psychologist Help You?</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Patient Bill of Rights</b>	<b>6</b>
<b>How is a Psychologist Trained, Educated and Licensed?</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>How Do You Choose a Psychologist?</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Can You Get Help From Someone Other Than a Psychologist?</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>What Happens During an Individual or Group Therapy Session?</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>What About "E-Treatment" Via Internet, Telephone or Fax?</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>What Psychologists Are NOT Supposed to Do</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>What Are Your Options If the Services Provided to You Are Unsatisfactory?</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>How Do You File a Complaint?</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Where Else Can You Turn to Discuss Your Situation?</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>What Can a Consumer Access on the Board's Web site?</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>Quick Recap of Psychology Resources</b>	<b>25</b>



## You're Not Alone

Perhaps you are seeking treatment for depression, stress or anxiety. You or your family may be considering counseling or therapy to improve the quality of important relationships. There are many reasons people turn to psychologists. If you are reaching out for help from a psychologist, you are not alone.

Psychological problems affect millions of people worldwide. They are more prevalent than cancer, diabetes, arthritis, alcohol abuse and traffic accidents and second only to heart conditions. Psychologists are specially trained to assist this large population, and their services help sufferers effectively deal with their problems so that they can live happier, healthier lives.

Every year thousands of Californians visit professional psychologists for help in better understanding themselves and others and in dealing with personal problems. If you think you may need to see a psychologist, this brochure can help you. It will explain your rights as a patient, provide guidance for choosing a psychologist and explain what a psychologist should and should NOT do. It also will tell you what to do if you think your psychologist has acted unprofessionally or overstepped professional boundaries.

## How Can a Psychologist Help You?

Psychologists provide many important services. They develop, give and interpret psychological tests. For example, they do disability evaluations, workers' compensation evaluations, fitness-for-duty evaluations and child-custody evaluations. They also help patients understand and resolve various psychological problems like depression, anxiety and substance abuse. They may provide treatment to individuals (adults and children), couples, families, groups, organizations or businesses using behavior modification, psychotherapy, hypnosis or consultation. Although psychologists do not prescribe medications, they may be helpful in providing appropriate referrals. Additionally, psychologists play key roles in management consultation for businesses and other organizations.



▼  
**Psychological problems affect millions of people worldwide.**  
▲

## The California Board of Psychology Works to Protect Consumers

The California Board of Psychology protects consumers of psychological services by ensuring high standards for the practice of psychology. The Board establishes rigorous licensing qualifications, investigates patient complaints and reaches out to empower consumers with information and resources.

The Board of Psychology is part of the California Department of Consumer Affairs. Board members include both licensed psychologists and members of the public.

# Patient Bill of Rights

## You have the right to:

- request and receive information about the psychologist's professional capabilities, including license status, education, training, experience, professional association membership, specialization and limitations.
- verify the status of the psychologist's license with the Board of Psychology and receive information about any license discipline. You can do this on the Board's Web site at [www.psychboard.ca.gov](http://www.psychboard.ca.gov). Click on "License Verification."
- have written information about fees, methods of payment, insurance reimbursement, number of sessions, length of sessions, professional assistance when your psychologist is not available (in cases of vacation and emergencies), and cancellation policies before beginning therapy.
- be informed about the limits of confidentiality and the circumstances in which a psychologist is legally required to disclose information to others.
- receive information regarding a treatment plan.
- be provided a safe environment, free from sexual, physical or emotional abuse, when in the care of a psychologist.
- expect that your psychologist should not involve you in any social or business relationship in addition to your therapy relationship.

- ask questions about your therapy or psychological assessment.
- refuse to answer any question or disclose any information you choose not to reveal.
- request that the psychologist inform you of your progress.
- know if there are supervisors, consultants, students, registered psychological assistants or others with whom your psychologist will discuss your case.
- refuse a particular type of treatment or end treatment at any time without obligation or harassment.
- refuse or request electronic recording of your sessions.
- request and (in most cases) receive a summary of your records, including the diagnosis, treatment plan, your progress and type of treatment.
- report unprofessional behavior by a psychologist (See section titled, "What Psychologists Are Not Supposed to Do," page 16).
- receive a second opinion at any time about your therapy or about your psychologist's methods.
- receive referral names, addresses and telephone numbers in the event that your therapy needs to be transferred to someone else and to request that a copy or a summary of your records be sent to any therapist or agency you choose.

## How is a Psychologist Trained, Educated and Licensed?

In California, with certain exceptions, only *licensed* psychologists may practice psychology independently. To become licensed, an individual must have an acceptable doctorate degree (a Ph.D., Psy.D. Ed.D, etc.), practice psychology under direct supervision for two years, and pass the national written examination and the California Board of Psychology's oral examination.

While an individual is practicing psychology under direct supervision in order to meet the licensure requirements, the supervisor is responsible for informing each patient in writing that the supervisee is unlicensed and is functioning under the direction and supervision of the supervisor.

In addition, the Board requires Live Scan fingerprinting in order to check each applicant's background for any criminal history. California law prohibits registered sex offenders from becoming licensed as psychologists. National reporting data banks are also checked to make sure that each applicant has no license disciplinary action in any other state.

Although the psychology license is generic and encompasses all areas of psychological practice (for example, psychological testing, biofeedback, child-custody evaluations, neuropsychology, hypnosis and psychotherapy), psychologists must have the appropriate education, training and experience to provide specialized services. California has ensured ongoing quality control for psychologists by requiring licensees to complete 36 hours of continuing education every two years. This continuing education must meet strict guidelines so psychologists are constantly updated on the latest new techniques and treatment options.

## How Do You Choose a Psychologist?

It is important to take time to select the right psychologist for your needs. First, clarify who needs psychological services — yourself, your children, your family, etc. Second, decide what area you want help with — substance abuse, eating disorders, depression, anxiety, etc. Then look for a psychologist trained and experienced to provide those

services. Ask friends or relatives for recommendations. Check with your health insurance company for a list of authorized providers in your area. Your primary care physician can often assist you. Obtain referrals by calling the national or state psychological associations noted at the end of this pamphlet. When you have a list of possible psychologists, you can narrow it down by asking yourself if there are any characteristics in a psychologist that may increase your comfort level (for example, whether the psychologist is male or female, old or young, from a particular ethnic group, etc.).

Next, check each psychologist's license status by calling the Board of Psychology License Verification Unit at (916) 263-2382 or by checking the license status on the Board's Web site ([www.psychboard.ca.gov](http://www.psychboard.ca.gov)). Just click on the "License Verification" button. The Board strongly recommends that you choose a licensed psychologist. A license ensures the psychologist has met stringent educational and experience standards and passed comprehensive written and oral examinations. It also ensures he or she has been the subject of a thorough criminal and professional background check.

It is important to verify the psychologist has a current, valid license. This means he or she is up-to-date on continuing education requirements and can legally practice psychology. What's more, a current license is required for your insurance company to accept the psychologist as a valid provider.

If a consumer complaint has resulted in action against the psychologist, you can find out more information by checking the Board's Web site ([www.psychboard.ca.gov](http://www.psychboard.ca.gov)) and clicking on "Enforcement" and then on "Board Actions." You can request a copy of the disciplinary documents to obtain more details on why discipline was imposed and about any limitations on the psychologist's practice. Request disciplinary documents by calling the Board's Enforcement Program at (916) 263-2691 or by e-mailing the Board at [bopmail@dca.ca.gov](mailto:bopmail@dca.ca.gov). There is a minimal charge of 25 cents per page to copy and process your request. You should know that unsubstantiated consumer complaint information is not public. Only those complaints that result in filed Accusations or informal Board disciplinary actions can be disclosed to the public.

The next step in the selection process is to make appointments to meet with the psychologists you are considering. Clarify whether there is a fee for this initial interview at the time you call for the appointment.

The Board recommends that you interview psychologist candidates just as you would anyone else you were considering for an important personal service.

**You are entitled to know:**

- from which university or school the doctorate degree was earned.
- when the degree was earned and the areas of specialized study.
- if the psychologist is board-certified by the American Board of Professional Psychology — this credential is not necessary for independent practice, but does evidence additional qualifications.
- how much experience the psychologist has in dealing with issues similar to yours.
- the approximate length of time the treatment is expected to take.
- if the psychologist prefers working with a particular age group, gender or ethnicity.
- if the psychologist has published articles in his or her specialty areas.
- if he or she has experience providing court testimony as an expert witness (forensic experience).
- whether it is possible that you may need drug therapy from a psychiatrist or other physician in conjunction with your psychotherapy and whether the psychologist can refer you to an appropriate physician.
- if the psychologist can accommodate your schedule for therapy.

Turn to the Patient Bill of Rights on pages 6-7 for other topics you may want to explore when interviewing a psychologist.

# Can You Get Help From Someone Other Than a Psychologist?



▼  
**The profession of psychology is unique in many ways, but there are other professionals that provide similar services.**

When considering treatment, there are many options available to you. The profession of psychology is unique in many ways, but there are other professionals that provide similar services:

**Psychological Assistants:** These are professionals registered by the Board of Psychology — (916) 263-2699 or [www.psychboard.ca.gov](http://www.psychboard.ca.gov) — and authorized to provide limited psychological services only under the direct supervision of a licensed psychologist or a board-certified psychiatrist. Often these individuals are earning hours of supervised professional experience toward meeting licensing requirements. They must have at least a master's degrees in psychology and are not allowed to prescribe drugs. Their services normally are less expensive than those of psychologists.

**Registered Psychologists:** These are professionals registered by the Board of Psychology — (916) 263-2699 or [www.psychboard.ca.gov](http://www.psychboard.ca.gov) — to work at nonprofit community agencies that receive at least 25 percent of their funding through some government source. They must have doctorate degrees in psychology and have completed at least one year of supervised professional experience. They are not allowed to prescribe drugs, and their services are normally less expensive than those of psychologists.

**Psychiatrists:** These are physicians licensed by the Medical Board of California — (916) 263-2382 or [www.medbd.ca.gov](http://www.medbd.ca.gov). They must have doctorate degrees in medicine, serve four-year residencies, pass the California State Board examination and be board-certified in psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. They are authorized to prescribe drugs. Their services normally are more expensive than those of psychologists.

**Marriage and Family Therapists:** These are professionals licensed by the Board of Behavioral Sciences — (916) 445-4933 or [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov). They must have master's degrees, serve a two-year internship and pass the Board's written and oral examinations. They can provide counseling regarding marriage, family and relationship issues. They cannot prescribe drugs and have limitations in doing psychological testing. Their services normally are less expensive than those of psychologists.

**Clinical Social Workers:** These are professionals licensed by the Board of Behavioral Sciences — (916) 445-4933 or [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov). They must have master's degrees and 3,200 hours of supervised experience and pass the Board's examinations. They use psychotherapeutic techniques, among other services, with individuals, couples, families and groups to improve the clients' quality of life. They cannot prescribe drugs and normally are less expensive than psychologists.

**Educational Psychologists:** These are professionals licensed by the Board of Behavioral Sciences — (916) 445-4933 or [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov). They must have master's degrees, have 3 years of experience as school psychologists and pass the written examination. They can work in schools or in private practice and provide educational counseling services such as aptitude and achievement testing. They cannot do psychological testing unrelated to educational services and they cannot prescribe drugs. Their services normally are less expensive than those of psychologists.

**Psychiatric Technicians:** These are professionals licensed by the Board of Vocational Nursing & Psychiatric Technicians — (916) 263-7800 or [www.bvnpt.ca.gov](http://www.bvnpt.ca.gov). They must have graduated from a qualifying psychiatric technician program and pass a written examination. They practice under the direction of a physician, psychologist, rehabilitation therapist, social worker, registered nurse or other professional personnel and are not permitted to practice independently. They offer services at state hospitals, day treatment/development centers, correctional facilities, psychiatric hospitals, vocational training centers and residential-care facilities. They can neither prescribe drugs nor do psychological testing. Their services normally are less expensive than those of psychologists.

**Priests, Ministers, Rabbis or Other Members of the Clergy:** These are unlicensed individuals. They may provide spiritual guidance, but may not treat for emotional or mental disorders, do psychological testing or prescribe drugs. Such members of the recognized clergy cannot practice independently and can only function under the purview of their recognized church.

**Self-Help and Peer-Support Groups:** These are groups of unlicensed individuals who have similar problems and meet to discuss possible solutions. The groups may or may not be led by a licensed mental-health professional. You can ask any licensed mental-health professional for a referral to such a group. There is usually no fee or just a nominal fee for these groups.



## What Happens During an Individual or Group Therapy Session?

### **Individual Therapy:**

During the first session, your psychologist will gather information about your personal, intellectual and emotional history and relationships. This information aids the psychologist in determining which strategies may be most helpful to you. Once your issues are clarified, you and the psychologist will outline goals. The process may include learning new problem-solving or coping skills, increasing self-understanding and self-confidence, exploring life patterns, and having a better sense of how you may be influenced by your surroundings and experiences.

It is important to think about what you would like to gain from psychotherapy. Take time before each session to think about what you want to accomplish during that meeting. As psychotherapy progresses, new goals may be established. This process is for you, so actively decide how to use the time. As issues or feelings (either positive or negative) come up during a session, you may want to share them with your psychologist. The basis of all good psychotherapy is trust. Your psychologist will listen and discuss your thoughts and feelings with you, so you can understand them more fully.

## Group Therapy:

In group psychotherapy, you are able to gain immediate feedback from fellow group members and the group psychologist. By knowing how others perceive you, you can increase your self-awareness and focus on the aspects of your life you wish to change. One of the most rewarding aspects of being in such a group is learning from others. You can increase self-awareness by examining your response to the feelings of others and their experiences.

Group psychology also gives you an opportunity to try out new behaviors, to express feelings you may have been hesitant to express, to assert yourself in new ways, and to experiment with new ideas. As you experience trust and security in the group, you may feel freer to take risks. You may need to determine how active and involved you want to be – what your comfort level is. Being active means expressing your reactions to what another person is saying or doing, sharing your concerns, listening to another person, asking for clarification when you don't understand, giving support and comfort, and seeking support yourself. It is unrealistic to expect that you will be verbally active during every session. Sometimes you may feel more reflective than active, preferring to listen and to consider new dimensions of your personality.

## What About “E-Treatment” Via Internet, Telephone or Fax?

Experts have voiced concern about therapy provided to patients over the Internet, by telephone or fax, so those situations should be approached with caution and common sense. In a psychotherapeutic relationship, it is important that the psychologist and the patient interact face-to-face so that body language and facial expressions can be an integral part of the experience. Additionally, a psychologist who provides therapy to patients in California, but who is licensed in a state other than California, could be practicing psychology without a license and could be criminally liable.

## What Psychologists Are NOT Supposed to Do

While the majority of psychologists are highly professional and ethical, it is good to remember that — as happens in other professions — some may bend or break the rules. If they break the rules, psychologists can directly or indirectly cause harm to patients. Following are examples of what psychologists (including psychological assistants and registered psychologists) should NOT do.

### Psychologists should NEVER:

- **have any type of sexual contact with a patient or a former patient within two years after termination of therapy.** This would include inappropriate touching, kissing and sexual intercourse. This type of behavior is NEVER appropriate, and it is cause for mandatory revocation of the psychologist's license.
- **violate a patient's confidentiality.** Except for rare situations that your psychologist should explain to you, a psychologist should never tell anyone what transpires during your therapy sessions or even the fact that you are a patient. Confidentiality is the cornerstone of successful therapy, and it instills a sense of trust in the therapist-patient relationship.
- **provide services for which they have no training, experience and education.** Although the psychologist license is generic and authorizes all areas of practice, it is against the law for a psychologist to practice outside his or her particular field of competence.
- **abuse drugs.** It is illegal for a psychologist to use any controlled substance, dangerous drug or alcoholic beverage in a manner that endangers either the psychologist or others or impairs his or her ability to practice with safety to the public.
- **commit fraud or other crimes.** Psychologists cannot overbill your insurance company in order to reimburse you for your co-payment, nor can they bill for services not performed in order to reduce the amount that you owe. If psychologists commit crimes that are related in any way to their practice, their licenses are subject to Board discipline.

- **advertise falsely.** Psychologists can only advertise they provide services for which they are educated, experienced and trained. An advertised service or fee must actually be available.
- **pay or accept compensation for referral of patients.** It is a conflict of interest and a cause for discipline for psychologists to be paid for patient referrals. Referrals must be made objectively without regard to personal gain and by considering only the patient's best interest.
- **act in an unprofessional, unethical or negligent manner.** Psychologists must practice within the parameters defined in the California Psychology Licensing Law and the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct.
- **assist someone in the unlicensed practice of psychology.** It is always illegal for a psychologist to aid in the commission of any crime, especially a crime that could cause extreme harm to the public when untrained, unlicensed individuals practice psychology. This occurs most often when a psychologist allows an unlicensed person to provide services in his or her office without being properly registered or supervised.
- **focus therapy on their own problems rather than on those of the patient.** It is unprofessional for a psychologist to use therapy time that you are paying for to discuss his or her own personal problems.
- **serve in multiple roles.** Examples of improper multiple roles include having social relationships with patients, lending patients money, having business relationships with patients, employing patients, etc. These relationships outside of the therapeutic setting blur professional boundaries and confuse or exploit patients.
- **abandon their patients.** It is cause for discipline for a psychologist to abandon a patient. If your treatment is terminated abruptly and you still require treatment, your psychologist is required to provide you with the names and telephone numbers of other practitioners who have the appropriate education, training and experience to take you on as a patient and continue your treatment.

## What Are Your Options If the Services Provided to You Are Unsatisfactory?

## How Do You File a Complaint?

If you think that your psychologist was unprofessional, violated your rights or caused you harm, you can file a complaint by calling the Board of Psychology at (800) 633-2322.

If you would like to write a letter, direct it to:

Board of Psychology  
1422 Howe Avenue, Suite 22  
Sacramento, CA 95825

Or, visit the Board's Web site at [www.psychboard.ca.gov](http://www.psychboard.ca.gov) to file an online complaint against a psychologist. For more information, e-mail the Board at [bopmail@dca.ca.gov](mailto:bopmail@dca.ca.gov).

Board staff can tell you how to file your complaint and will refer you to other agencies if necessary. The Board has the authority to take formal disciplinary action against a psychologist's license (for example, revocation, suspension, probation, etc.) or to issue a citation and fine. Please note that the Board's authority is limited by a statute of limitations to violations that occurred within three years of discovery by the Board, or within seven years from the date of the act or omission, whichever first occurs.

The most effective complaints are those that contain firsthand, verifiable information. While anonymous complaints will be reviewed, it may be impossible to pursue them unless they contain documented evidence of the allegations (such as video or audio tapes, photographs or written documents). You will be asked to provide any documentary evidence that you may have related to your complaint.

## What Happens When You File a Complaint Against a Psychologist?

When you file a complaint against a psychologist, psychological assistant or registered psychologist, you eventually will be asked to put your complaint in writing. The Board will need specific information such as the names, addresses and telephone numbers of both the complainant (you) and the psychologist, as well as a detailed account of the alleged unprofessional or illegal conduct. You will need to sign a release form that authorizes the Board to obtain patient records and to talk to the psychologist about your complaint. If a preliminary review of your complaint indicates that a violation of law may have occurred, your complaint will be forwarded on to an investigator. You may be interviewed by the investigator regarding your complaint. On rare occasion, you may need to testify at an administrative hearing if the Board files formal charges against the psychologist based on your complaint. This would only happen if the Board and the psychologist cannot agree on settlement terms. In more than 80 percent of the cases where formal charges are filed, the psychologist waives a formal hearing and agrees to settlement terms.



**The most effective complaints are those that contain firsthand, verifiable information.**



## How Are Complaints Processed?

The Board receives complaints concerning hundreds of different licensees, professional issues and situations. Within 10 days after receipt of your complaint, the Board's complaint analyst will notify you that your complaint was received. Complaints are reviewed daily.

Some complaints concerning minor infractions that do not warrant formal disciplinary action are dealt with through a variety of non-disciplinary methods. These may include direct mediation between the parties involved, citation and fine or educational intervention between the psychologist and an expert case reviewer.

If a complaint warrants formal investigation, it is referred to the appropriate Medical Board District Office for investigation. The Board of Psychology contracts with the Medical Board of California for investigative services. Investigators are trained peace officers. At this point, as the complainant, you would be notified that your complaint was referred for formal investigation. If your case goes forward to investigation, an investigator will interview you. The psychologist is then offered an opportunity to respond to the allegations in an interview with the investigator. The psychologist will be advised of the nature of the complaint, including your name as the complainant. It should be noted that complaint and investigation information is considered confidential at this point, not a matter of public record. The law prohibits a psychologist from harassing you for filing a complaint.

Once an investigation is completed, an expert case consultant will review the entire investigation file to determine whether a violation of law may have occurred. If the expert finds a possible violation, the case is submitted to the California Office of the Attorney General. A deputy attorney general acts as the Board's attorney and will review the case to determine whether or not there is sufficient evidence to support the filing of formal charges. At this point, as the complainant, you would be notified that your complaint was referred to the Office of the Attorney General for administrative action.

If your case is accepted by the Office of the Attorney General, a document called an "Accusation" is drafted by the deputy attorney general and signed by the Board's Executive Officer. You, as the complainant, will receive a copy of the Accusation. The Accusation is the first public document in the disciplinary process. It is important to note here that only initials are used to identify complainants in Accusations, so you don't need to worry that your name will be a matter of public record.

If an informal settlement agreement cannot be reached between the psychologist and the Board, an administrative hearing would take place. The Board encourages negotiated settlements because they eliminate the need for costly administrative hearings and protect consumers by imposing disciplinary action sooner. To this end, the Board has adopted Disciplinary Guidelines designed to set forth the Board's penalty standards. You may contact the Board for a free copy of the Disciplinary Guidelines or download them on the Board's Web site ([www.psychboard.ca.gov](http://www.psychboard.ca.gov)). Click on either "Publications" or "Enforcement" to access the Guidelines. If a hearing is held, the Board must demonstrate "by clear and convincing evidence to a reasonable certainty" that the allegations are true. For that reason, it is generally necessary for you, as the complainant, to testify in person at the hearing.

In the event that a hearing must take place, an Administrative Law Judge presides over the hearing. After the hearing is completed, the judge will issue a "Proposed Decision" stating the findings (facts that were proven at the hearing) and will offer a recommendation for resolution of the case (e.g., license revocation, suspension, probation, dismissal). The judge uses the Board's Disciplinary Guidelines in formulating the Proposed Decision. The Proposed Decision is distributed to Board of Psychology members for vote. If the Board votes in favor of the Proposed Decision, it becomes the Final Decision. If the Board votes not to adopt the Proposed Decision, the hearing transcript is circulated among the Board members, written arguments are solicited from the defense counsel and the Office of the Attorney General, and the Board subsequently issues its own Final Decision. Final Decisions are matters of public record and are available upon request. You, as the complainant, will be sent a copy.

This "procedural due process" can take up to two years from the time you file a complaint until the time that a Final Decision is rendered.

## Should Unlicensed Practice Be Reported to the Board?

If you believe that an unlicensed person is engaging in activities for which a psychologist license is required, you should report such activity to the Board. The Board will investigate allegations of unlicensed practice and, if sufficient evidence is found, will forward the information to the local District Attorney's Office for criminal prosecution. The Board does not have the authority to criminally prosecute. Such action must be conducted by the local District Attorney.

## Are Psychologists Required to Report Unprofessional Conduct by Colleagues?

This question is most often raised by psychologists after a patient informs them of a sexual relationship with one or more previous therapists.

All psychotherapists who are advised by a patient of sexual involvement with another therapist are required by law to give that patient the pamphlet titled "Professional Therapy NEVER Includes Sex." This pamphlet explains it is illegal for a therapist to have sex with a patient (or with a former patient within two years after the termination of therapy) and to explain the options available. You can contact the Board by telephone at (916) 263-2696 for a free copy of this pamphlet or you can download it from the Board's Web site ([www.psychboard.ca.gov](http://www.psychboard.ca.gov)). Just click on "Publications" to access the pamphlet online.

Psychologists, however, are not legally required to report misconduct by colleagues. Complaints of a more egregious nature (such as sexual misconduct) require the victim to make a complaint. Doctor-patient confidentiality laws make it impossible for a psychologist to file a complaint on behalf of a patient unless the patient has given written authorization.

## Where Else Can You Turn to Discuss Your Situation?

If you think that your psychologist was unprofessional, violated your rights or caused you harm, you may also find it helpful to discuss your situation with one or more of the following individuals:

- a trustworthy family member or friend
- a family physician or other qualified health professional
- a priest, minister, rabbi or other member of the clergy

Depending on the nature and severity of your complaint, you may wish to:

- file a complaint with your local police department or district attorney
- consult an attorney and file a civil lawsuit
- file a complaint with the Ethics Committee of state or national psychological associations:

California Psychological Association  
1022 G Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
(916) 325-4720  
[www.calpsychlink.org](http://www.calpsychlink.org)

American Psychological Association  
750 First Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4242  
(202) 336-5500  
[www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)

## What Can a Consumer Access on the Board's Web site?

The California Board of Psychology maintains an array of online resources that can assist you in evaluating a psychologist or learning more about psychological treatment. Here's a summary of the consumer information available at [www.psychboard.ca.gov](http://www.psychboard.ca.gov):

- Consumer Information — Click on "Consumer Information"
- Verification of licensure — Click on "License Verification"
- Disciplinary action against licensees/registrants — Click on "Enforcement" and then on "Board Actions"
- How to contact the Board's staff — Click on "Administration" and then on "How to contact the Board of Psychology staff"
- To evaluate the service you receive from the Board — Click on "Administration" and then on "Customer Service Evaluation"
- Publications — Click on "Publications" and select from a list which includes the brochure, "Professional Therapy Never Includes Sex," the Board's "Disciplinary Guidelines," the Board's laws and regulations and all of the Board's past newsletters
- Press releases — Click on "Enforcement" and then on "Press Releases"
- Complaint information and complaint form to download or file online — Click on "Enforcement" and then on "Filing Complaints"
- Frequently asked questions — Click on "FAQ"
- E-mail the Board — Click on "E-Mail Us"
- Board meeting agendas and meeting minutes — Click on "Meetings"



## Quick Recap of Psychology Resources

**Verify a psychologist is licensed:** Check license status by calling the Board of Psychology License Verification Unit at (916) 263-2382 or by checking the license status on the Board's Web site ([www.psychboard.ca.gov](http://www.psychboard.ca.gov)). Just click on the "License Verification" button.

**Verify a psychiatrist is licensed:** Check license status by calling the Medical Board of California License Verification Unit at (916) 263-2382 or by checking the license status yourself on the Board's Web site ([www.medbd.ca.gov](http://www.medbd.ca.gov)). Just click the "Search Online for Information On a Doctor" button.

**Verify license status for marriage and family therapists, social workers or educational psychologists:** Check license status by calling the Board of Behavioral Sciences at (916) 445-4933 or by checking the license status yourself on the Board's Web site ([www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov)). Just click on the "Verify Licenses" button.

**Psychological Assistants:** These are professionals registered by the Board of Psychology — (916) 263-2699 or [www.psychboard.ca.gov](http://www.psychboard.ca.gov).

**Registered Psychologists:** These are professionals registered by the Board of Psychology — (916) 263-2699 or [www.psychboard.ca.gov](http://www.psychboard.ca.gov).

**Psychiatrists:** These are physicians licensed by the Medical Board of California — (916) 263-2382 or [www.medbd.ca.gov](http://www.medbd.ca.gov).

**Marriage and Family Therapists:** These are professionals licensed by the Board of Behavioral Sciences — (916) 445-4933 or [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov).

**Clinical Social Workers:** These are professionals licensed by the Board of Behavioral Sciences — (916) 445-4933 or [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov).

**Educational Psychologists:** These are professionals licensed by the Board of Behavioral Sciences — (916) 445-4933 or [www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov).

**Psychiatric Technicians:** These are professionals licensed by the Board of Vocational Nursing & Psychiatric Technicians — (916) 263-7800 or [www.bvnpt.ca.gov](http://www.bvnpt.ca.gov).

California Psychological Association  
1022 G Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
(916) 325-4720  
[www.calpsychlink.org](http://www.calpsychlink.org)

American Psychological Association  
750 First Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20002-4242  
(202) 336-5500  
[www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)



Printed on Recycled Paper



**California  
Board  
of Psychology**

▼

**The California Board of Psychology protects consumers of psychological services by ensuring high standards for the practice of psychology. The Board establishes rigorous licensing qualifications, investigates patient complaints and reaches out to empower consumers with information and resources.**

▲

## Acknowledgment

The Board of Psychology thanks those who took the time to review this consumer brochure during its development. Your valuable input has helped ensure that this booklet provides high-quality and useful information and guidance to the public.

## How to Obtain Additional Copies

Single Copies of this Consumer Guide to Psychology Services are available at no charge from either of the following sources:

California Board of Psychology  
1422 Howe Avenue, Suite 22  
Sacramento, CA 95825

Publications Office  
California Department of Consumer Affairs  
P.O. Box 310  
Sacramento, CA 95802.

To purchase copies in quantity, contact the Department of General Services at (916) 928-4630.



CALIFORNIA BOARD OF PSYCHOLOGY

1422 HOWE AVENUE, SUITE 22

SACRAMENTO, CA 95825-3200

---