What are the differences between Psychologists, Clinical Psychologists, Counselling Psychologists, Psychotherapists, Counsellors and Psychiatrists?

The Stratos counselling network includes psychologists, psychotherapists and counsellors but not psychiatrists.

Regardless of the professional background and training of the person you meet with, they have all satisfied a demanding selection process by Stratos. They have provided evidence of their membership of professional bodies; they have had at least 6 years of broad-ranging counselling experience so that they are experienced in working with a wide range of issues. They are under regular professional supervision and they have participated in an in-depth interview of an hour and a half with Stratos senior staff. Their professional standards and ability to relate to a wide range of clients and issues are assessed in this interview and in reference checks. Regardless of their professional background they will all focus on helping you understand your issue and work out ways to resolve it or cope if the causes cannot be removed or reduced.

The following gives a brief overview of the differences between the disciplines, bearing in mind that there will be differences between individuals within a profession.

**Psychologists**

Psychologists have expertise in all aspects of psychological functioning, including cognitive, emotional, behavioural, spiritual and intellectual dimensions. Psychologists assess, advise and assist people to improve their personal, social, educational and vocational functioning.

Psychologists use a range of assessments and therapies appropriate to their specialty within the field of psychology. They use evidence-based techniques, of which Cognitive Behaviour Therapy, also known as CBT, is primary. Specialties include clinical (with a focus on mental health issues), coaching, counselling, education, health, sports and work or organizational psychology.

Psychologists have a minimum of a Masters level university degree in psychology, undertake a supervised internship after the Masters degree and are registered as a psychologist by the New Zealand Psychologists Board. They hold a current practicing certificate.

**Clinical Psychologists**

Clinical psychologists are considered experts in providing psychological assessment and testing, evidence-based psychological interventions and in diagnosing and treating mental health issues.
In addition to a minimum of a Masters level university degree in psychology, the training for clinical psychologists requires a post-graduate diploma in clinical psychology which includes two years’ supervised experience in assessing, treating mental health issues and managing problem conditions, human behaviour, feelings and thoughts.

**Counselling Psychologists**

Counselling psychologists are considered experts in the applied psychology of counselling and psychological therapy. They enable and empower clients experiencing a range of problems of living to enhance their personal, social, educational and vocational functioning.

The training requirements for counselling psychologists are a similar length to those for clinical psychology.

**Psychotherapists**

Psychotherapists explore patterns that have caused and are causing difficulties. Recurring difficulties of a similar sort are often an indication that a person is trying to resolve something they are not fully aware of. Psychotherapy helps bring unresolved issues, such as from a person’s childhood, into the person’s conscious awareness and uses exploration of these issues to resolve unhelpful ways of thinking, behaving or feeling.

Registered Psychotherapists have an annual practicing certificate from the Psychotherapists Board of Aotearoa New Zealand. Psychotherapists receive their training from a variety of accredited training institutions, but this is generally equivalent to the combination of a Master’s degree, personal development work, and a substantial amount of supervised practice.

**Counsellors**

The techniques which counsellors use are similar to those used by psychotherapists. They offer a variety of approaches including client focussed and problem solving, and may offer cognitive behaviour therapy, often known as CBT. A counsellor will help the client explore the thoughts, behaviours and feelings that are contributing to current problems. In conversation with the counsellor, a client gains insight into how problems are impacting on their life and develops an action plan.

All counsellors in the Stratos network are members of a New Zealand professional counselling association and have an annual practising certificate. Most have been university educated or attended an accredited learning institution.

**Psychiatrists**

Psychiatrists are medical doctors who completed medical training and then specialist training in mental health. In total it takes 12 years to train as a psychiatrist. They often use a combination of medication and psychological therapies.
Psychiatrists are all members of the Australia and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists and are bound by the Code of Ethics of that body.

Generally psychiatrists treat more serious illnesses such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, serious depression, and anxiety disorders in adults and behavioural disorders and ADHD in children and adolescents. In more serious cases this treatment may include admission to hospital.

Psychiatrists are **not** normally part of an Employee Assistance Programme.