



Counselling Psychologist

SALARY (2018): \$120,000

I am a licensed psychologist who provides counselling interventions to individuals, couples and families. I follow a scientist-practitioner model applying theories and evidence-based support to help my clients to cope with trauma, manage mental illnesses, handle stress effectively, and develop meaningful relationships. Some of my colleagues provide psycho-educational testing, but this is not part of my practice. I love being a therapist and helping people to improve their lives is my passion. I work in a private practice, which means I operate my own independent business and set my own hours. This also means I have to do my own marketing, networking and web design. I see about 20 clients a week, I write confidential case notes and keep meticulous financial records. To keep my skills up I consult often with other colleagues, volunteer with my professional association, and look for opportunities for ongoing learning. My work is rewarding, but sometimes it's emotionally taxing, so taking care of my own mental health is a must. I take time to run, meditate and cook, and I book one holiday weekend away every few months.

The Tip: Experience in helping roles is an asset. Volunteer at the peer support centre, on a crisis phone line or with a peer-to-peer helpers program early on to get a taste of front-line work.

PRIORITY KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS:

Advanced Research & Analysis Skills

- Select appropriate interventions based on research and best practices
- Provide appropriate resources
- Provide sound assessment and interventions
- Critically analyze literature

Contextual Knowledge

- Expert understanding of human behaviour
- Uphold ethical standards of professional practice
- Clear understanding of limits and scope of practice

Knowledge of Human Behaviour

- Support clients to explore motivations, behaviour, emotions, thoughts and patterns
- Guide exploration of difficult topics
- Support growth and development
- Sensitivity to how behaviours are shaped by circumstances, privilege, experience & attitudes
- Expert intervention skills to support client growth, healing and/or change

Advanced Communication Skills

- Exceptional listening skills
- Open-minded, empathetic, respectful
- Excellence in verbal and non-verbal communication
- Conflict resolution skills
- Provide constructive feedback

Inter-personal Skills

- Work with diverse populations
- Support individuals to discuss difficult topics
- Keen observation skills
- Relate to a wide range of individuals

Intra-personal Skills

- Able to manage daily stress
- Capable of managing crises
- Self-aware, able to acknowledge and manage biases
- Interest in people and systems
- Curiosity, creativity, interest in lifelong learning

Additional Skills

- Strong organizational skills
- Fundamental business acumen
- Self-motivated, independent, ethical

BUILDING BLOCK EXPERIENCES:

Education & Learning:

- Bachelor of Arts (Psychology–Honours)
- Master of Arts in Clinical Psychology
- Ph.D. in Counselling Psychology
- Completed licensing requirements to become a psychologist in Alberta (included a 1,600-hour supervised internship, a written test and an oral exam)
- I continue to attend conferences, workshops and training seminars annually

I was raised in a single-parent home and we existed on a low income. I remember receiving help from professionals, neighbours, and community supports, and I'm sure that inspired me to want to help others. I come from a family of "helpers". My father was a social worker and my mom is a teacher. We went to community events all the time and usually we volunteered in some way. I thought I would follow in my father's footsteps and go into social work, but psychology was a better fit. The emphasis on science, behaviour and the individual won me over.

Employment Experiences:

- I worked in a convenience store and as a server before I got a job in a group home supporting people with disabilities
- During my fourth-year undergrad thesis I had the chance to work in my supervisor’s lab. She was studying memory and I was able to assist on experiments and write-ups.
- Practicum experiences during my master’s and Ph.D. included work experience in clinics, hospitals, a university counselling centre and a family counselling practice
- While in graduate school I worked at the hospital as a statistician, working to complete a public health data report
- After my Ph.D., I was hired for a one-year contract providing counselling to patients in a health clinic
- I worked for three years in a not-for-profit community-based counselling practice, then I opened a private practice and slowly transitioned this into a full-time position

All of my jobs revolved around helping people... even the early ones. Working in the Memory Lab was a real asset because I was able to do “real” research work and I was included on a peer-reviewed publication. This gave me an edge when applying to graduate school. I didn’t love the stats job as much, but I sure learned a lot from it. Practicum experiences helped to shape my practice in a significant way. Take your time selecting those and try out a few different settings to diversify your training.

Community Experiences:

- I volunteered at our university’s sexual assault centre and then at a women’s health clinic while I was an undergrad. Talking with people, providing some direction, and giving information about useful resources felt pretty good.
- I volunteered on a crisis hotline in our community. I took on several late shifts each month. The training was outstanding.

Answering crisis calls was great experience and it allowed me to broaden my network (especially nice given I was in a new city). Volunteering for a university student centre was amazing. You really get to establish yourself as an active citizen, maybe even a leader—and it makes you feel like you belong on campus. The Sexual Education Centre became my go-to place; my second home.

Contextual Experiences:

- I think it was good that I moved away from home to attend university; I wish I had lived in residence, but because I had a cat, that option wasn’t open to me then.
- I moved to a new city to attend university and I think this was good for me – it helped me to grow up and be part of other kinds of communities.

I think growing up below the poverty line has influenced my understanding of people, privilege, bias and gratitude. I don’t think that you have to go through hard times to become a great psychologist, but I can’t deny that it’s given me a lot of experience to draw from.
Community was at the centre of my childhood. We were very close-knit, and I had many chances to help and be helped. This shaped my character in a big way. Empathy wasn’t something I had to learn.

Relationships:

- I had a really great thesis supervisor in my undergrad, and she encouraged me to apply for the master’s and to believe in my work
- My first practicum supervisor became a true mentor for me. I can still call him if I get

The support I received from my honours thesis supervisor really was pivotal in my career path. While I was trying to finish my degree, a close family member became quite ill, and I had to take time off to support them. My supervisor guided me back to my studies when I was able

stuck on a client issue. He's terrific!

to return, and her steady support and clear expectations helped me to get back on track.