

Navigating the MFT Licensing Process

Introduction

The Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS) is the regulatory agency responsible for licensing Marriage and Family Therapists (MFT) in the State of California. The BBS also licenses clinical social workers (LCSW) and educational psychologists (LEP). Currently, the BBS has over 65,000 active licensees and registrants.

The MFT Licensing Process in a Nutshell

We need to gather an understanding of the “big picture” of the MFT licensing process before we discuss the more detailed aspects of this process. Any person pursuing an MFT license in California will probably follow a similar path:

1. Get your qualifying masters degree (and pick up some supervised experience while you are at it)
2. Register with the BBS as an MFT Intern
3. Gain the rest of your supervised experience (and complete any additional coursework required of you)
4. Apply for MFT examination eligibility
5. Pass the MFT Standard Written Examination
6. Pass the MFT Written Clinical Vignette Examination
7. Get your official MFT license

Different individuals might take a slightly unique path towards licensure depending on whether or not they move out of state or take a few years off. However, the vast majority of future MFTs will follow a path much like the one described in 1-7 above.

A Detailed Look at How to Become an MFT in California

As you might assume, the entire process of becoming an MFT in California takes years to complete. The process involves a variety of forms, applications, and examinations. This handout (and the accompanying presentation) provides you with valuable information on how to make the licensure process a smooth one.

MFT Intern Registration Process

You will apply to be a registered MFT Intern upon graduation from your qualifying degree program. The application is easily accessible in the “[Forms and Publications](#)” section of the BBS Web site.

The [MFT Intern registration application](#) can be broken down into four parts:

1. One page application form
2. Official school transcripts with the degree posted

3. Program certification
4. Live Scan receipt

The one page application requests the applicant to fill out some basic information. The applicant also requires a passport sized (2X2) photo. The applicant should pay particular attention to the address entered on this application. As required by law, the BBS must post the address of record for all its registrants and licensees on the Internet or provide it over the phone or in writing if requested by the public. Consider using a business or post office box address to protect your privacy.

The school transcripts must be in the school's sealed envelope and have the qualifying degree date posted.

A faculty member at your school will fill out the program certification form. Inquire with your department to determine who fills out the program certification form at your school.

A copy of your Live Scan receipt should also accompany your application. You should get your fingerprints done *before* you send in your MFT Intern application to the BBS. The forms for Live Scan fingerprinting and the instructions are included in the MFT Intern registration application.

The Board advises, whenever possible, to send in a complete application package (e.g. items 1-4 in one package). Whenever sending important documents to the Board, make photocopies prior to mailing and consider using a "priority mailing service" with delivery confirmation and a tracking feature.

NOTE: You must become registered with the BBS prior to beginning employment in a private practice setting.

The 90-Day Rule

As an MFT Trainee in school, you are allowed to gain hours of supervised work experience; then, you graduate and apply to the BBS to receive a registration number to continue gaining hours of supervised work experience. So what happens during the period of time immediately after graduation, but before you get your registration number? You will need time to get your MFT Intern registration application materials together after you graduate, but what about the time you spend working right after you graduate? Will you lose those hours?

In short, the answer is "no," provided that you apply for your MFT Intern registration number within 90 days of your degree conferral date (in most cases your graduation day) and are thereafter granted a registration number. The hours of qualifying supervised work experience that you gain after you graduate will be accepted as long as you have your MFT Intern application postmarked no later than 90 days after your degree conferral date.

Hours gained in the "90-Day Rule" period must comply with experience and supervision rules for MFT Interns.

Additional Coursework Requirements

In addition to your qualifying degree, you will also have to complete some additional coursework requirements. In essence, these requirements are in place to ensure you have education in key subject matter areas.

1. Child Abuse Assessment and Reporting (7 hours)
2. Human Sexuality (10 hours)
3. Alcoholism and Chemical Dependency (1 semester unit; must be in your degree program if your school is in California)
4. Spousal/Partner Abuse (15 hours; must be in your degree program if your school is in California)
5. Psychological Testing (2 semester units or 3 quarter units)
6. Psychopharmacology (2 semester units or 3 quarter units)
7. California Law and Professional Ethics (2 semester units or 3 quarter units)
8. Aging and Long Term Care (10 hours)

These additional coursework requirements are often incorporated into the curriculum of a qualifying MFT degree program. To see which courses from your school fulfill these requirements, visit the "[Schools](#)" section of the BBS Web site.

If you graduate and still need to take some of these courses, you can take them after you graduate from accredited or approved universities; county, state, or governmental entities; or approved Continuing Education (CE) Providers. A list of approved (CE) approved providers is available on the "[Forms and Publications](#)" section of the BBS Web site.

Required Supervised Work Experience

In addition to your degree and additional coursework, you are required to accrue a significant amount of supervised work experience. You must accrue **3,000 hours of supervised work experience** and **104 weeks of supervision**. Both the supervised work experience and the weeks of supervision are broken down into categories.

This experience must be gained under the supervision of a licensed mental health professional. Depending on the type license your supervisor holds, he or she needs to meet different requirements in order to supervise your hours. Generally, your supervisor must maintain one of the following licenses and meet the following requirements:

1. Marriage and Family Therapists – must be licensed for two years, take a six-hour supervision course every renewal period, and hold a valid license
2. Licensed Clinical Social Workers - must be licensed for two years, take a six-hour supervision course every renewal period, and hold a valid license
3. Licensed Psychologist - must be licensed for two years and hold a valid license
4. Licensed Physicians nationally board certified in psychiatry - must be licensed for two years and hold a valid license

For a detailed list of other supervisor requirements please see the [Responsibility Statement for Supervisors of a MFT Trainee or Intern](#).

Check Your Supervisor's License

You cannot gain hours under someone holding an invalid (delinquent) license. You can verify the status of your supervisor's license anonymously using the BBS' "[Online License Verification](#)" feature.

You cannot gain hours under someone holding an invalid (delinquent) license or has been licensed for less than two years in the State of California. The only exception to the two year license requirement in California is someone supervising Trainees at an academic institution. In this case out-of-state licensure and California licensure can be combined to meet the two year requirement. The supervisor still must be licensed in California if providing supervision. You can verify the status of your supervisor's license anonymously using the BBS' "[Online License Verification](#)" feature.

104 Weeks of Supervision

Any week in which an MFT Trainee or Intern participates in one hour of individual supervision or two hours of group supervision counts as one supervised week. Of your 104 required weeks of supervision, 52 of those weeks must be weeks in which you meet with your individual supervisor for at least an hour.

You will need to be supervised in order to accrue work experience, so you will be completing the 104 supervised week requirement and the 3,000 hours of work experience requirement simultaneously. You must complete both requirements, however, before you can apply for examination eligibility.

3,000 Hours of Supervised Work Experience

The 3,000 hours of supervised work experience breaks down into different categories.

- A. Direct Counseling Work Experience
 1. 1. Individual Psychotherapy (no min and no max)
 2. 2. Couples, Families, and Children (min 500 credited hours)
 1. The first 150 conjoint couples and family hours can be double counted (e.g. 150 actual hours X 2 = 300 credited hour)
 3. 3. Group Psychotherapy (max 500 hours)
 4. 4. Telemedicine Counseling, including telephone counseling (max 375 hours)
- B. Administrating and evaluating psychological tests, writing clinical reports, writing progress notes or process notes (max 250 hours)
- C. Other Non-Counseling Work Experience (max 1,250 credited hours; all items below when added together shall not exceed 1,250 credited hours)
 1. 1. Workshops, seminars, training sessions, and conferences (max 250 hours)

2. 2. Personal Psychotherapy (max 300 credited hours; e.g. 100 actual hours X 3 = 300 credited hours)
3. 3. Client centered advocacy
4. 4. Direct Supervisor Contact (both individual and group counts as work experience)

The maximum amount of hours that a Trainee can accrue while still in his or her degree program is 1,300 hours, which breaks down as follows:

750 max counseling and supervision (A1-A4, C4) + all remaining hours categories = 1,300 max pre-degree hours

You need at least one hour of individual or two hours of group supervision in any week that you claim supervised work experience. 40 hours of work experience is the maximum amount of work experience that you can claim in a week, and five hours of work experience is the maximum amount of supervision you can claim towards work experience in a given week. *You may need to gain additional hours of supervision per week in order to comply with your counseling experience to supervision ratio.*

Starting January 1, 2010, MFT Interns working in a governmental entity, school, college/university, or an institution that is both nonprofit and charitable may obtain all supervision via videoconferencing.

Counseling Experience-Supervision Ratio

In order to claim direct counseling experience (anything in category A above), you must obtain the proper amount of supervision. Depending on whether you are an MFT Trainee or a registered Intern, you must comply with different supervision requirements.

NOTE: For our purposes, a unit of supervision can be either one-hour of individual supervision or two hours of group supervision.

As an MFT Trainee, you must meet the mandatory minimum of one unit of supervision per week to count work experience in a work setting. Also, you will be required to obtain **one unit** of supervision for every **five hours** of direct counseling experience earned in each setting. As an MFT Intern, you must meet the mandatory minimum of one unit of supervision per week to count work experience in a work setting, and you need to obtain an additional unit of supervision in any week in which you earn more than 10 hours of direct counseling/psychotherapy hours in each work setting.

MFT Interns working in a governmental entity, school, college/university, or an institution that is both nonprofit and charitable may obtain all supervision via videoconferencing.

Example of Work Experience – Supervision Requirements

MFT Trainee Example

Jennifer is an MFT Trainee, and she wants to determine if she met her supervision-counseling experience ratio over a three week period. In week one, she accumulated 10 hours of direct counseling experience and had one hour of individual supervision and two hours of group supervision (two units). In week two, she accumulated 15 hours of direct counseling experience and had one hour of individual supervision and two hours of group supervision (two units). In the third week, she accumulated 10 hours of direct counseling experience and had two hours of individual supervision and two hours of group supervision (three units). Over the course of three weeks of MFT Trainee experience, Jennifer accumulated 35 hours of direct counseling work experience and seven hours of supervision. Jennifer has met her supervision requirement over this three week period.

MFT Intern Example

Marina is an MFT Intern who usually obtains nine hours of direct counseling work experience per week and one hour of individual supervision (one unit). In one week, she has to cover for two ill coworkers, and she obtains 25 hours of counseling experience in this week. In order to receive credit for all the direct counseling work experience gained in this week, Marina needs to obtain two units of supervision in this week since she exceeded 10 hours of direct counseling work experience.

For more examples, see [Changes to MFT Supervision/Experience Requirements](#).

Forms

While gaining your hours you will use the following forms:

- [Responsibility Statement for Supervisors of an MFT Trainee or Intern](#) (Your supervisor signs this form)
- [Weekly Summary of Hours of Experience](#) (You log your weekly hours on this form; the supervisor signs off)
- [MFT Experience Verification](#) (You total up all your hours from a setting or under a supervisor on this form; the supervisor signs off)

For your MFT Intern experience only you must also submit W-2s for each employment setting in which you were paid. For the most recent year, you can submit a current pay stub in lieu of W-2s. If you volunteered, a letter from the employer is required indicating your voluntary status.

Applying for Exam Eligibility and Tips Relating to the Exam Process

The [MFT Examination Eligibility Application](#) is available in the [Forms and Publications](#) section of the BBS Web site. The application includes a checklist to assist you in sending all the correct materials.

The Six-Year Rule

Hours of experience must be gained no more than six years immediately preceding the date on which you filed your application for MFT examination eligibility. The only exception is a maximum of 500 hours of experience as a Trainee (direct counseling and supervision) that may be older than six years.

Example: Andrea applies for MFT examination eligibility. The Board receives her application on 4/27/2012. All of the hours she gained between 4/27/2006 and 4/27/2012 will be acceptable. If needed, she could count up to 500 hours of direct counseling and supervision hours gained as a Trainee while enrolled in practicum that are older than 4/27/2003.

Once your application is approved, you will begin the process of taking your examinations (the Standard Written and the Written Clinical Vignette Examination). Once you are in the examination process, meeting your examination deadlines is critical. Failing to meet an examination deadline results in the abandonment of your examination eligibility and requires you to resubmit an application to become re-eligible. Once you pass both examinations, you can apply to receive your Marriage and Family Therapist license.

For more information please visit the [Applicant/Registrant](#) section of the BBS Web site.