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What does a psychologist do?

A psychologist is someone who likes to help other people to develop new ideas on how to make their lives more meaningful and happy.

All people are exposed to great experiences in life, and sometimes less pleasant experiences that tend to rock one's life boat. This may cause your emotions to be in turmoil and you might not know what to do with the sadness, anger, loneliness and fear that you might feel. These events might even affect your body and you may not be able to read, hear, or move around as you were formerly accustomed to. There can be a myriad of reasons why people might struggle to pay attention and concentrate and one may even find that the planning of daily tasks and daily life becomes difficult. Sometimes the storms of life become so overwhelming that people find they start to withdraw and avoid others. Psychologists are there to provide a helping hand in times like these.

Perhaps you remember what your first day at school was like; scared and uncertain between a myriad of strange faces, sounds and events. Or you may remember how you felt when you as teenager did not fit in with the rest of the group, perhaps because your family did things just different from the rest of the friends. And just when you became accustomed to the high school, you had to make a new start when it was time to go to technicon or university or start your career. Psychologists are trained to assist people in these times of change.

Sometimes a family experiences so much conflict that divorce seems to be the only solution to the parents. Spouses and children cannot spend time with each other as they used to. In other families a parent or a child may be diagnosed with a terminal illness like cancer, which will cause drastic changes for everyone in the family. Other events such as accidents or being attacked and bitten by a dog - which can cause a person's physical appearance to change dramatically, and even limit bodily functions - can cause a sense of loss and a person might feel really sad (even angry) about what he / she had lost. Psychologists help people to cope with such traumatic events.

Psychologists are trained to help people of all ages, from infants to elderly people. They completed a three-year degree at a university and then obtained an additional Honours and Master's Degree in Psychology. This training usually lasts 6 years or longer. Afterwards psychologists may choose to specialize in an area they are interested in and obtain an additional Doctor's degree. To ensure that psychologists always have the best interests of people at heart, they must register with the Health Professions' Council of South Africa (HPCSA).

There are many different types of psychologists, and every psychologist usually has specific areas of interest where they would help people. One gets Clinical Psychologists, Industrial Psychologists, Educational Psychologists, Counseling Psychologists, Neuro-psychologists, Forensic Psychologists and Research Psychologists.

You may ask any psychologist what his / her field of expertise is. Ask if they can help with your specific problems. Any psychologist, who feels that your problems are outside his / her area of training or interests, can put you in touch with other psychologists or other professionals that will be able to help you.

A human being is a very special, but also a uniquely complicated being, and therefore psychologists work with other professionals such as doctors, pediatricians, neurologists, psychiatrists, other psychologists, social workers, occupational therapists, speech therapists and teachers who can make meaningful contributions to help you reach your goals in life sooner. Psychologists may ask other trained people such as Psychometrists and Psychological Counselors to assist them.

A Psychiatrist is a medical doctor who also studied Psychology; therefore they (not Psychologists) are allowed to prescribe medication. They help people whose emotional and behavioral problems can be treated

through different neurochemical factors in drugs. They also focus on the diagnosis, treatment and rehabilitation of mental disorders like depression, bi-polar disorder, schizophrenia and anxiety disorders. They may also provide therapeutic help to people and assist them through discourse or other procedures.

A Psychometrist studied at a university for four years and has an Honours Degree in Psychology. They are trained to provide psychological assessments, complete questionnaires and do tests under the supervision of a registered psychologist. They are not allowed to counsel people. Once they have completed their training, they must register with the Medical Council (HPCSA) before they may practice.

A Psychological Counselor is a person who completed a four year B-Psych degree at a university. They are required to do about 750 hours of practical work under the supervision of a registered psychologist as part of their training. Once they have completed their training, they must register with the Medical Council (HPCSA) before they may practice. A Psychological Counselor may help people in his / her field of training under the supervision of the registered psychologist.

You may ask any person in the field of Psychology about his / her qualifications and the areas he / she specializes in. The Psychologist, Psychometrist, Psychological Counselor or any other counselor may in turn refuse to help you if they feel that they are not sufficiently trained in that specific area. Usually they will help you by referring you to colleagues and other professionals who specialize in that particular area of need. Please feel free to ask.