

# MARRIAGE & FAMILY THERAPIST

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## STUDENT HANDBOOK

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# PART I

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## OBTAINING A MARRIAGE & FAMILY THERAPIST QUALIFYING DEGREE

The Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT) licensure process begins the moment you start taking classes in a qualifying degree program. Although licensure may be years away, knowing the requirements beforehand is important. This handbook from the California Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS) will help you understand the process.

### **On Your Way**

The first step is to be certain your master's or doctoral degree is from a qualifying degree-granting institution.

To check, go to the BBS Web site at:

[www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/qualify\\_schools.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/qualify_schools.shtml).

### **Additional Coursework Required**

In addition to a qualifying degree, the BBS requires you to complete additional courses on eight specific topics.

**TIP:** You can find a list of specific classes that meet these requirements online at [www.bbs.ca.gov/qualify\\_schools.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/qualify_schools.shtml). Find your school, then click on "Additional Courses Required."

You must complete the following two courses as part of your degree program before you graduate: (Note: If you completed your education out of State, you can complete these two courses after graduation.)

- Alcoholism and Chemical Substance Abuse Dependency (15 hours or one semester unit)
- Spousal/Partner Abuse, Detection, and Intervention (15 hours)

**Note:** If you began your degree program before January 1, 2004, your hours for Spousal/Partner Abuse, Detection, and Intervention can be any number of hours.

You must complete the following three courses through a BBS-approved continuing education provider (check the BBS Web site); a county, State, or government entity; or an accredited or approved college or university:

- Child Abuse Assessment and Reporting (seven hours)
- Human Sexuality (10 hours)
- Aging and Long-Term Care (10 hours)

**Note:** If you began your degree program before January 1, 2004, you are not required to complete Aging and Long-Term Care hours as a pre-licensure coursework requirement, but it will be a continuing education requirement for your first license renewal.

You must complete these three courses at an accredited or approved college or university:

- Psychological Testing (two semester or three quarter units)
- Psychopharmacology (two semester or three quarter units)
- California Law and Professional Ethics (two semester or three quarter units)

**TIP:** Keep the course description and/or syllabus for the courses you believe fulfilled the requirements. The BBS may need the materials to verify the course content.

## Pre-Degree Hours of Experience

As an MFT student, you may count personal psychotherapy hours and work experience as an MFT Trainee toward your supervised experience requirement.

## Personal Psychotherapy

This is group or individual therapy you undergo with a licensed mental health professional. Keep track of the dates of your personal psychotherapy; you will need to log the hours on the MFT examination eligibility application. Licensed mental health professionals include Marriage and Family Therapists, Licensed Clinical Social Workers, Licensed Psychologists, and physicians nationally certified in psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology.

**TIP:** The BBS “triple counts” personal psychotherapy hours. For example, if you completed 50 hours of personal psychotherapy, the BBS will credit you with 150 hours toward licensure. You can count a maximum of 100 personal psychotherapy hours—i.e., 300 credited hours—toward licensure.

## **MFT Trainee**

In order to count supervision and work experience hours as an MFT Trainee, you must comply with both of the following:

- You must complete a minimum of 12 semester or 18 quarter units in a qualifying degree program.
- You must have a written agreement between the school and each work site that details each party's responsibilities, including how supervision will be provided.

The maximum amount of work experience hours that an MFT Trainee can accrue while still in a qualifying degree program is 1,300 hours. Within this 1,300 hours of work experience, no more than 750 shall be counseling/psychotherapy work experience and supervision. For more information relating to MFT work experience requirements, supervision to counseling experience ratios, categorical minimums and maximums, required forms, and other resources, please refer to Part 3: Gaining Hours of Work Experience.

You will also accrue weeks of supervision while working as an MFT Trainee. Any week in which you meet with your supervisor for at least one hour of individual supervision or two hours of group supervision qualifies as a week of supervision. You are required to gain at least 104 weeks of supervision in addition to 3,000 hours of qualifying work experience to be eligible to sit for the MFT licensing examinations.

For more information regarding supervised experience requirements, supervision to counseling experience ratios, categorical minimums and maximums, required forms, and other resources, please refer to Part 3: Gaining Hours of Work Experience.

# PART II

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## BECOMING A MARRIAGE & FAMILY THERAPIST INTERN

Graduating with your qualifying degree means you are ready for the next major step on your path toward MFT licensure: applying for an MFT Intern registration number.

The Intern Registration Application packet is available online at [www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml). When you return the application packet to BBS, it must include:

- The completed MFT Intern application
- A copy of your official transcripts in the school's sealed envelope
- A Program Certification form completed by your school
- A Live Scan receipt (retain one copy for your records)
- A check or money order for \$75

### **The 90-Day Window**

If you apply for an MFT Intern registration number within 90 days after your degree was conferred, you can count the hours you accrue between your degree conferral date and your registration's issue date. The BBS honors the application postmark date when considering the 90-day window.

For example: The school conferred Mark's qualifying degree on May 16, 2009. He applied to be an MFT Intern on June 30, 2009. He submitted his application within 90 days after degree conferral; therefore, he may count the hours he gained between his degree conferral date and the issue date of his intern registration.

**IMPORTANT:** You cannot begin working in a private practice setting until you receive an MFT Intern registration number.

**TIP:** You can find out if you have been issued an MFT Intern registration number by looking up your name on the BBS Web site at [www.bbs.ca.gov/quick\\_links/weblookup.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/quick_links/weblookup.shtml).

# PART III

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## GAINING HOURS OF WORK EXPERIENCE

You are required to gain 3,000 hours of qualifying work experience and 104 weeks of supervision to be eligible to take the MFT licensing examinations. This experience can be a combination of experience gained as an MFT Trainee and an MFT Intern. Qualifying work experience is broken down into the following categories:

### A. Direct Counseling Work Experience

- Individual Psychotherapy (no minimum or maximum)
- Couples, Families, and Children (minimum 500 hours)
  - The first 150 conjoint couples and family hours can be double counted (e.g. 150 actual hours x 2 = 300 credited hours)
- Group Psychotherapy (maximum 500 hours)
- Telephone and Telemedicine Counseling (maximum 375 hours)

### B. Administrating and Evaluating Psychological Tests, Writing Clinical Reports, Writing Progress Notes or Process Notes (maximum 250 hours)

### C. Other Non-Counseling Work Experience (maximum 1,250 credited hours; all items below when added together shall not exceed 1,250 credited hours)

- Workshops, Seminars, Training Sessions, and Conferences (maximum 250 hours)
- Personal Psychotherapy (maximum 300 credited hours; e.g. 100 actual hours x 3 = 300 credited hours)
- Client Centered Advocacy
- Supervision (both Individual and Group Supervision)

## Supervised Weeks

You must obtain the minimum amount of supervision in a week (one hour of individual or two hours of group) in order to claim experience in any given week. If you receive no supervision in a week, you cannot claim work experience for that week. Any week in which you obtain the minimum amount of supervision qualifies as one of 104 required weeks of supervision. Up to five hours of supervision each week can be counted towards your required 3,000 hours of work experience.

Also, be aware that of the 104 required weeks of supervision, 52 weeks must be weeks in which you met with an individual supervisor for at least an hour.

**TIP:** Many experience requirements changed on January 1, 2010. Supervised experience gained prior to this date should be documented on the appropriate forms. Please visit the “Applicant/Registrant” or “Forms and Publication” section of the BBS Web site ([www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov)) to obtain these forms.

In order to claim direct counseling experience, Trainees and Interns must obtain the proper amount of supervision.

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

Trainees must meet the mandatory minimum of one unit of supervision per week to count work experience in a work setting. Also, Trainees are required to obtain **one unit** of supervision for every **five hours** of direct counseling experience earned in each setting.

Interns must meet the mandatory minimum of one unit of supervision per week to count work experience in an employment

setting and obtain an additional unit of supervision in any week in which the Intern earns more than 10 hours of direct counseling experience hours in that employment setting.

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.

## **Supervision Forms**

The BBS has three basic forms you will need to use while accumulating your hours.

- Responsibility Statement Forms for Supervisors of a Marriage and Family Therapist Trainee or Intern – This form should be signed by your supervisor when supervision begins.
- Weekly Summary of Hours of Experience – This form will be used regularly to log in your weekly hours.
- Marriage and Family Therapist Experience Verification – This form will be used to verify all the hours gained in a particular setting or under a particular supervisor.

## **Remember the Six-Year Rule**

All supervised work experience must be gained no more than six years before you apply for MFT examination eligibility. The only exception is a maximum of 500 hours of pre-degree counseling work experience and supervision gained while enrolled in a practicum course.

For example: The BBS receives Susan's application for MFT examination eligibility on April 27, 2012. The hours of experience Susan gained between April 27, 2006 and April 27, 2012, would meet the requirements. Outside of this six-year window, she could also count up to 500 hours of counseling and supervision hours earned as an MFT Trainee in supervised practicum.

**TIP:** Keep your paperwork for hours gained pre-degree separate from those gained post-degree. Doing so will speed up application processing.

## **Verification of Employment**

Beginning January 1, 2010, applicants for MFT examination eligibility must submit copies of W-2 tax forms for hours gained as an MFT Intern. If a copy of the W-2 tax form is not available for the current year, a copy of a current pay stub will be accepted. If an MFT Intern volunteers in a work setting, a letter from the employer will be accepted as verification of employment.

## Helpful Advice Relating to Gaining Your Hours of Experience

1. Always renew your MFT Intern registration on time. Submit your renewal fee at least six weeks before the expiration date to ensure your registration does not expire. Hours earned under an expired MFT Intern registration will not count.
2. Keep track of your supervision paperwork, including all Responsibility Statements, Weekly Summaries, and Experience Verification forms. Make sure all the forms are complete and signed. You will need to submit the forms with original signatures when you apply for licensure. You will submit Weekly Summaries only if requested by the BBS.
3. Review the required hours of experience for licensure so that you know on which areas of work experience to focus.
4. Use the BBS Experience Calculator to determine how close you are to finishing your hours of work experience. You can access the calculator on the BBS Web site ([www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/exp\\_calc.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/app-reg/exp_calc.shtml)).
5. Contact the BBS for Help. If you have questions and your last name begins with A-K, please call (916) 574-7854. If your last name begins with L-Z, please call (916) 574-7853.

# PART IV

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## APPLYING TO TAKE THE EXAMS

You have completed your hours. You are now ready to submit your MFT examination eligibility application to begin the last phase of the licensure process. You will find the application for MFT licensure in the Forms and Publications section of the BBS Web site at [www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml). You will need to pass a Standard Written Examination and a Written Clinical Vignette Examination before you are eligible to receive your license.

The application includes a useful checklist to ensure that you submit all of the appropriate materials.

If your application is approved, the BBS will send you a letter notifying you that you are eligible to take the examination. About two weeks later, you will receive the MFT Standard Written Examination Candidate Handbook in the mail. This handbook is your official study guide. On the back, you will find your eligibility notice and your deadline for taking the examination. This handbook, as well as the MFT Written Clinical Vignette Examination Candidate Handbook, is also available in the “Forms and Publications” section of the BBS Web site. ([www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml)).

**TIP:** Do not submit an application for MFT examination eligibility without first completing ALL pre-licensure requirements.

### **Important Fact**

If you continue to work during the exam process, even as a volunteer, you must be supervised. You cannot practice independently unless you are licensed by the BBS.

You do not need an Intern registration number in order to take the examination, but you may need one for employment. Check with your employer.

If necessary, you may apply for a second MFT Intern registration number. However, you cannot work in a private practice setting with a second MFT Intern registration number.

### **If you do not pass an exam**

You have up to a year to retake an examination that you did not pass. To retake a test, submit the MFT Examination/ Re-Examination form with the required \$100 fee. You will have to wait six months to retake an exam you failed.

**TIP:** Keep track of your deadline for taking or retaking the examination. If you miss the deadline, you will have to re-apply for examination eligibility and pay the \$100 fee again.

**TIP:** Need help studying for the MFT licensing examinations? Visit the “Forms and Publications” Web page at [www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/forms.shtml) to access the *MFT Examination Study Guide*.

### **If you pass the MFT Standard Written Examination**

Once you pass the MFT Standard Written Examination, you can apply to take the MFT Written Clinical Vignette Examination. To do so, you need to submit an MFT Examination/Re-Examination form with the required \$100 fee.

### **If you pass the Written Clinical Vignette Examination**

If you pass, you will receive an application for your MFT initial license at the test site center. Complete the simple one-page application and submit it with the required fee. See your *MFT Clinical Vignette Examination Candidate Handbook* for specifics on the fee amount owed. Once the BBS receives this fee and processes the application, you will receive an MFT license number.

### **Congratulations!**

Your license number will be posted on the BBS Web site before you receive your certificates in the mail. To find out if a license has been issued, check the BBS Web site at [www.bbs.ca.gov/quick\\_links/weblookup.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/quick_links/weblookup.shtml). The BBS will mail you an engraved wall license along with your smaller license certificate shortly after license issuance.

**TIP:** Now that you're a licensed MFT, be sure to read BBS publications like the *BBS News* and visit the Web site regularly to stay informed on continuing education requirements and other important topics related to your license. You should also sign up for the BBS' free e-mail subscriber list to ensure you are kept up to date ([www.bbs.ca.gov/quick\\_links/subscribe.shtml](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/quick_links/subscribe.shtml))

# MFT EXPERIENCE INFORMATION FOR HOURS GAINED ON OR AFTER JANUARY 1, 2010

## DIRECT COUNSELING

EXPERIENCE TYPE	MINIMUMS & MAXIMUMS
1. Individual Counseling or Psychotherapy (performed by you)	No Minimum or Maximum
2. Couples, Family, and Child Psychotherapy (performed by you)	Minimum 500 hours
3. Group Therapy or Counseling (performed by you)	Maximum 500 hours
4. Telemedicine Counseling (performed by you)	Maximum 375 hours

**Note - Pre-Degree Hours: A maximum of 750 hours of clinical experience (1-4 above), including direct supervisor contact (7,8 next page), can be counted pre-degree.**

## MISCELLANEOUS

5. Non-Counseling Experience (A-D below)	Maximum 1,250 hours combined
A. Attending Workshops, Seminars, Training Sessions or Conferences	Maximum 250 hours
B. Personal Psychotherapy (received by you)	Maximum 100 hours x 3
C. Client Centered Advocay (CCA)	Maximum 1,250 hours
D. Direct Supervisor Contact	Max 1,250 hrs   Min 52 wks/hrs
6. Administering and Evaluating Psychological Tests, Writing Clinical Reports, Progress Notes, or Process Notes	Maximum 250 hours

## NOTES

Many people gain hundreds of hours in this area due to the limits in other categories.

May be completed pre- or post-degree or a combination of both. Up to 150 hours of conjoint couples and family therapy may be double counted.

May be completed pre- or post-degree or a combination of both.

May be completed pre- or post-degree or a combination of both.

**EXAMPLE:** A trainee earns 625 hours of clinical experience comprising a combination of categories 1,2,3 and 4. In addition, the trainee earns 125 hours of individual supervision pre-degree, for a total of 750 hours.

Categories 5A and 5B have their own maximum withing the 1,250 combined maximum.

May be completed pre-or post-degree or a combination of both.

Up to 100 hours may be earned. These hours are triple-countered by the Board for a total of 300. Hours may be completed pre-or post degree or a combination of both.

May be completed pre- or post-degree or a combination of both.

Complete both pre- and post-degree. For more info see "Supervision section

May be completed pre- or post-degree or a combination of both.

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## MFT EXPERIENCE INFORMATION

SUPERVISION

EXPERIENCE TYPE	MINIMUMS & MAXIMUMS	
7. Supervision, Individual (One-on-One)	Minimum 52 Weeks / Hours	
8. Supervision, Group	No Minimum or Maximum	
<p><b>NOTE:</b> A TOTAL MINIMUM of 104 hours / weeks of supervision is required. Persons gaining hours pre-or post-degree must have a minimum of one (1) hour of individual supervision,</p>		
<p><b>SUPERVISION RATIOS REQUIRED FOR DIRECT COUNSELING EXPERIENCE</b></p> <p><b>Ratio- Hours of Clinical Experience to Units of Supervision</b> (One unit of supervision is equal to one (1) hour of individual or two (2) hours of group supervision)</p>	<p><b>Trainees:</b> Minimum one (1) unit of supervision for every five (5) hours of client contact in each setting.</p> <p><b>Post-degree:</b> Minimum one (1) unit of supervision each week in each setting; AND one additional unit during any week in which more than ten (10) hours of client contact is gained in each setting.</p>	
<p><b>WEEKS OF EXPERIENCE REQUIRED</b></p>	<p><b>Minimum 104 weeks</b></p>	
<p><b>TOTAL HOURS OF EXPERIENCE REQUIRED</b></p>	<p>Pre-Degree Maximum 1,300 hours</p>	<p>Post-Degree Minimum 1,700 hours</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>TOTAL</b> Minimum 3,000 hours</p>		

TOTALS

## NOTES

May be completed pre- or post-degree or a combination of both.  
Note: These may be non-consecutive weeks.

No pre- or post-degree hours are required in this area. Not more than eight (8) supervisees are permitted per group. Must be provided in one two-hour session or two one-hour segments.

**OR** two (2) hours of group supervision during each week in which experience is claimed, for each work setting (see ratios required below). A maximum of five (5) hours of supervision may be credited per week.

For trainees, ratios can be calculated based on the average number of hours gained over the entire period of time a trainee works in a particular setting.

Supervision ratios cannot be averaged for persons gaining hours post-degree.

For examples of how to apply supervision ratios, see *Answers to Most Frequently Asked Questions Relating to MFT Interns and Trainees*.

Completed pre and post degree.

1,300 maximum pre-degree hours = 750 maximum counseling and supervision (categories 1-4, 7, 8) + all remaining hours categories.

Please note that this information is intended only as a general reference. The BBS encourages you to thoroughly read the laws and regulations relating to licensure for marriage and family therapists. Please consult the laws beginning at Sections 4980 of the California Business and Professions Code and the regulations beginning with Section 1800 of Title 16 of the California Code of Regulations. The laws and regulations are available on the Board's Web site at **[www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lawsregs.pdf](http://www.bbs.ca.gov/pdf/publications/lawsregs.pdf)**.

## GLOSSARY:

**BBS News** – The bi-annual newsletter published by the BBS. This publication is mailed to all active licensees and registrants in addition to being available on the BBS Web site.

**Couples, Family, and Children** – Work experience in diagnosing, and treating couples, families, and children falls in this category. This category includes individual and group counseling sessions with couples, families, and children.

**Live Scan** – A fingerprinting process in which applicants roll their fingers across a computer pad. Typically, results are processed much quicker than traditional fingerprinting processes.

**MFT Evaluator** – An employee at the BBS responsible for processing examination eligibility applications and answering questions and emails relating to MFT licensing requirements.

**Unit of Supervision** – A unit of supervision can be either one hour of individual supervision or two hours of group supervision. The two hours of group supervision must be obtained within the same week.



**BOARD OF BEHAVIORAL SCIENCES**

1625 NORTH MARKET BLVD., SUITE S-200

SACRAMENTO, CA 95834

(916) 574-7830

TDD: (800) 326-2297

[www.bbs.ca.gov](http://www.bbs.ca.gov)