

Job Search Hints and Tips for Mental Health Counselors, Addictions Counselors, and Marriage and Family Therapists

These job search hints and tips were collected from 20 regional agencies, hospitals, and clinics in Spring 2006.

LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION

Are letters of recommendation important in the application process?

Yes – 13 No – 7

If yes, from whom do you prefer to see letters of recommendation written?

Internship site supervisors - 13

Former supervisors - 13

Graduate faculty members - 7

Others – Current Employers - 1

Undergraduate faculty members – 0

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Please give examples of the key questions that you would ask when interviewing a mental health counselor, an addictions counselor, and a marriage and family therapist:

Mental Health Counselor

- What is the most important aspect of working with mentally ill sufferers?
- Please describe your understanding of motivational interviewing and stages of change.
- On a daily basis, what special skills, talents, and ambitions would you bring to this job?
- Identify and describe the dimensions of an ASAM-structured assessment.
- Describe a great idea you have seen recently in the mental health field. Discuss why you think it is a great idea or unique.
- What are your strengths? Your challenges?
- Describe your personal experience regarding documentation: assessments, treatment plans/behavior plans, and progress notes.
- Discuss two significant concepts you have learned about this work that weren't taught at school.
- What strategies to you employ when problem solving?
- Scenarios where they describe globally how they would proceed with treatment.
- Behavioral questions—"Describe a team success."
- Quality chart review question.
- Books for themselves.
- Theoretical approach to therapy.
- Describe your clinical background and, while doing so, include your theoretical framework in working with delinquent youth.
- How do you understand mental health disorders?
- How would you treat mental health disorders?
- How would you assess for [x] disorder?
- How would you approach a conflict with a co-worker?
- What is/are your model(s) of treatment?

- What has brought you into the field?
- What are you interested in learning and developing?
- Describe for us your professional goals and how employment at [agency/hospital/clinic] may assist you in this realization.
- Why did you choose to enter the mental health profession?
- What will you bring to our "table?"
- What types of clients are you most comfortable working with and why?
- Which clients are you most uncomfortable working with?
- Previous experience including internship of responding to hostile, demanding person, sad person, suicidal person. Explain how you handled the situation.
- Share education and/or work experience.
- Experience in public speaking and teaching.
- Strengths and stretches.
- Experience facilitating support groups.
- Experience working with volunteers.
- Questions regarding boundaries/ethics.
- Questions regarding self-care.
- What are your long-term goals?
- What area of counseling is most interesting to you?
- What is your theoretical perspective?
- What interests you about this kind of work?
- Why would you be good at this kind of work?
- What are your strengths?
- What do you know about our agency?
- Diagnostic skills (5 axis), theory, and treatment modalities.
- Past counseling experiences as a therapist.
- Strengths and areas still growing.
- Questions about a situation and how you would handle it in a treatment setting.
- How you work with peers and what would those peers say about you.
- Evidence-based models.
- How are you qualified for this job?
- State how you would fulfill the 5 core competencies of this specific position.
- What do you like best about your last position?
- What did you like least about your last position?
- What was your best accomplishment on your most recent job?
- Why did you leave your last two jobs?
- How does this job relate to your career plans?
- What qualities would you desire in a manager?
- How do you handle pressure?
- How do you feel about the duties associated with this position?
- What do you expect from [agency/hospital/clinic]?
- Why do you want this position?
- In your own words, define the following: "respect;" "compassion;" "commitment;" "quality;" and "service."
- What is your theoretical orientation?
- What populations have you worked with and which do you want to work with?
- What are your passions? Strengths? Weaknesses?

- What experiences have you had in providing services to a correctional population?
- What was the setting of your work with a correctional population?
- Questions aimed at determining suitability for work in a locked correctional facility.
- What experience do you have with depressed subjects, with character disorders, with hypochondriacal, with children, with adolescents?
- What theoretical approaches have formed your practice?
- What is it about [agency/hospital/clinic] that causes you to seek employment with our organization?
- Would you be comfortable working in our faith-based environment?
- How would you respond to the inevitable question posed by clients who have suffered much in their lives: "If God is love, why did He allow [x] to happen to me?"
- How will you maintain your own emotional well being and balance in your life as a mental health counselor?
- What do you consider as your primary strengths as a mental health counselor?
- Which, if any, populations or mental health issues would be challenging for you?
- Experience dealing with difficult clients.
- Understanding of MI and case management.

Addictions Counselor

- What is the nature of addiction?
- Please describe your understanding of motivational interviewing and stages of change.
- On a daily basis, what special skills, talents, and ambitions would you bring to this job?
- Identify and describe the dimensions of an ASAM-structured assessment.
- Describe a great idea you have seen recently in the mental health field. Discuss why you think it is a great idea or unique.
- What are your strengths? Your challenges?
- Describe your personal experience regarding documentation: assessments, treatment plans/behavior plans, and progress notes.
- Discuss two significant concepts you have learned about this work that weren't taught at school.
- What strategies do you employ when problem solving?
- You have a client who is preparing to be released back to the community. As part of their release, they need to have you review their relapse prevention plan. What information will you look for in their plan to indicate it is a good plan?
- How do you understand addictive disorders?
- How would you treat addictive disorders?
- How would you assess for [x] disorder?
- How would you approach a conflict with a co-worker?
- What is/are your model(s) of treatment?
- What has brought you into the field?
- What are you interested in learning and developing?
- If you have personal experience with abuse issues, how will you manage them in your work?
- Describe for us your professional goals and how employment at [agency/hospital/clinic] may assist you in this realization.
- Why did you choose to enter the mental health profession?
- What will you bring to our "table?"
- Tell us about your education, training, and experience in the field of addictions.
- What is your opinion of the relationship between mental illness and substance abuse?
- What sorts of questions do you ask clients to screen for co-morbid psychiatric problems?
- What are the primary motivations for individuals seeking treatment?

- What is your theoretical perspective about addictions?
- What are your long-term goals?
- What are your personal views about addicts?
- What interests you about this kind of work?
- Why would you be good at this kind of work?
- What are your strengths?
- What do you know about our agency?
- Know the addiction process and the differences in substances.
- Become dually accredited—have CADAC.
- How are you qualified for this job?
- State how you would fulfill the 5 core competencies of this specific position.
- What do you like best about your last position?
- What did you like least about your last position?
- What was your best accomplishment on your most recent job?
- Why did you leave your last two jobs?
- How does this job relate to your career plans?
- What qualities would you desire in a manager?
- How do you handle pressure?
- How do you feel about the duties associated with this position?
- What do you expect from [agency/hospital/clinic]?
- Why do you want this position?
- In your own words, define the following: “respect;” “compassion;” “commitment;” “quality;” and “service.”
- What experiences have you had in providing services to a correctional population?
- What was the setting of your work with a correctional population?
- Questions aimed at determining suitability for work in a locked correctional facility.
- What experience do you have with alcoholics, street drug users, medication abusers?
- What experience do you have with the families of addicted persons?
- Are you familiar with the main substances of abuse, their classifications, and their effects?
- What is it about [agency/hospital/clinic] that causes you to seek employment with our organization?
- Would you be comfortable working in our faith-based environment?
- How would you respond to the inevitable question posed by clients who have suffered much in their lives: “If God is love, why did He allow [x] to happen to me?”
- How will you maintain your own emotional well being and balance in your life as an addictions counselor?
- What do you consider as your primary strengths as an addictions counselor?
- Which, if any, populations or addictions issues would be challenging for you?
- What appeals to you about working as an addictions counselor?
- What is your approach for addressing each stage in the addiction recovery process?
- How hopeful are you of success regarding recovery from various types of addictions?

Marriage and Family Therapist

- What is your view on systems theory?
- Describe the theoretical approach you use in marriage and family counseling.
- What are your skills for handling hostility, aggressive behavior, and crisis?
- Describe a stressful situation that might occur in counseling and how you would handle it.
- How would you address developmental differences of children of different ages and backgrounds?
- Please describe your understanding of motivational interviewing and stages of change.

- On a daily basis, what special skills, talents, and ambitions would you bring to this job?
- Identify and describe the dimensions of an ASAM-structured assessment.
- Describe a great idea you have seen recently in the mental health field. Discuss why you think it is a great idea or unique.
- What are your strengths? Your challenges?
- Describe your personal experience regarding documentation: assessments, treatment plans/behavior plans, and progress notes.
- Discuss two significant concepts you have learned about this work that weren't taught at school.
- What strategies to you employ when problem solving?
- Scenarios where they describe globally how they would proceed with treatment.
- Behavioral questions—"Describe a team success."
- Quality chart review question.
- Books for themselves.
- Theoretical approach to therapy.
- In the beginning stages of treatment, the families and significant others of anti-social, addicted men are often overwhelmed, ambivalent, burnt-out or otherwise resistant to change. Share an example from your own professional experience of what specific steps you took to engage an ambivalent family member in a family therapy intervention.
- What is/are your model(s) of treatment?
- What has brought you into the field?
- What are you interested in learning and developing?
- What have been your experiences with marriage and family that you bring to this position?
- How do you screen for possible psychiatric issues in your client population?
- What approach do you take in assessing and planning a family intervention?
- What is the modality you prefer in working with couples?
- Who do you see as your client?
- What education have you received about couples counseling?
- What would you do if you felt biased towards one partner over the other?
- What interests you about this kind of work?
- Why would you be good at this kind of work?
- What are your strengths?
- What do you know about our agency?
- Understanding of models and theory.
- Understanding of interventions—evidence-based.
- How are you qualified for this job?
- State how you would fulfill the 5 core competencies of this specific position.
- What do you like best about your last position?
- What did you like least about your last position?
- What was your best accomplishment on your most recent job?
- Why did you leave your last two jobs?
- How does this job relate to your career plans?
- What qualities would you desire in a manager?
- How do you handle pressure?
- How do you feel about the duties associated with this position?
- What do you expect from [agency/hospital/clinic]?
- Why do you want this position?

- In your own words, define the following: "respect;" "compassion;" "commitment;" "quality;" and "service."
- What is your experience with working with couples? With 2-generation families? With extended families?
- How familiar are you with child development?
- What aspects of family intervention are you familiar with?
- What is it about [agency/hospital/clinic] that causes you to seek employment with our organization?
- Would you be comfortable working in our faith-based environment?
- How would you respond to the inevitable question posed by clients who have suffered much in their lives: "If God is love, why did He allow [x] to happen to me?"
- How will you maintain your own emotional well being and balance in your life as a marriage and family therapist?
- What do you consider as your primary strengths as a marriage and family therapist?
- Which, if any, populations or marriage and family issues would be challenging for you?
- What is your approach when one or both partners in a couple or family exhibit high levels of dysfunction or pathology?

HOW TO APPLY

In the job search process, in your agency/clinic, is it considered appropriate for a prospective employee to drop in to drop off a resume and/or application?

Yes – 15

No – 5

- "It is best to look for openings on the web."
- "[Drop off application/resume] with identified staff person."
- "[Okay to drop off application/resume] if there is a specific position open."
- "Apply through the Human Resources office or on-line; [not in person]."
- "Wouldn't hurt [to drop off application/resume in person], but the application process requires completion of a supplemental application which is uniformly scored."
- "Better—make an appointment for interview."

APPROPRIATE INTERVIEW ATTIRE

What do you consider the appropriate attire for a candidate interviewing with your agency or clinic?

Fine-department-store-salesperson-type attire - 11

Business suit - 6

Friday casual – 2

- "It's about respect and professionalism."
- "Professional—not expensive."
- "Business casual."
- "Long pants or skirts and no revealing tops."
- "[Appropriate attire] depends on the position—either business suit or fine-department-store-salesperson-type attire."
- "Neat/professional."

VACANCY ANNOUNCEMENTS

Where does your agency or clinic advertise vacancies for counselors/therapists? Links to vacancies are also available on the Educational Career and Licensing Services' website <http://www.lclark.edu/dept/ecls/counselor.html>.

- Our website
- Craig's List
- The Oregonian
- Sunday Oregonian
- Salem Statesman Journal
- Corvallis Gazette Times
- Community newspapers
- Culturally-specific weekly newspapers
- Portland Community College
- Colleges and universities
- Professional publications
- Local and national psychology publications
- State of Oregon Department of Human Services' website
- Oregon Employment Department
- USA Jobs
- ACCBO website
- CareerCenterJobs.org

WORDS OF WISDOM FOR NEW COUNSELORS AND THERAPISTS

What words of wisdom would you offer to counselors and therapists entering the field for the first time?

- Do your own work with self-development and growth. Clients will push those buttons/areas that are unhealed. Very intense.
- Willingness to perform volunteer work to initially gain experience. Enroll in introductory medication training.
- Never stop reading and learning. Know your clients can teach you as much as professionals. Maintain empathy. Observe boundaries at all times.
- Convey a passion to learn. A passion for recovery.
- Study mission/values statements (available at website).
- Be patient. The work takes time and energy. Check out all options (non-profit/community vs. state vs. federal vs. private practice) before settling on a career direction.
- You need balance in your life to do good work. You need perspective on your own issues. You need to be continually learning...ways to enhance work.
- Have the professional demeanor/poise established before seeing one client. Recognize the ethical dilemmas you could/will face and be willing/open to seek mentoring on these issues.
- Understand level of inexperience and be open to entry level and continuing to learn.
- Confidence—passion—enthusiasm—team oriented—knowledgeable—compassionate.
- Plan on 3-5 years of team work, multidisciplinary work prior to doing private practice. Maintain boundaries, ethics, and laws—**do no harm**.
- Be flexible, seek to expand skills, seek licensure, be patient with peers and clients, understand their personal learning curve, have liability insurance, remember why you want to be in this profession, self-care.
- Be professional and continue professional development.
- Practice good self-care!
- There is no substitute for experience. Find a way to get it.
- Expect change. Seize opportunities to broaden your practice. Take vacations.
- Be yourself—have adequate support (consult with other mental health professionals)—good self-care. Less mature/experience counselors/therapists work in agency rather than private practice for a few years.