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PART I

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.

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. 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 for pre-licensure, but the hours 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)

**Note:** For updates regarding the status of approved schools, please visit the “News Flash” section of the BBS Web site (www.bbs.ca.gov/quick_links/news_flash.shtml).
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.

As an MFT Trainee, up to 1,300 hours of work experience can be claimed in the following categories:

A. Counseling and Supervision hours (Maximum 750 hours)
   - Individual Psychotherapy/Counseling
   - Couples, Families, and Children
   - Group Psychotherapy/Counseling
   - Telephone Counseling
   - Telemedicine Counseling
   - Supervision (both Individual and Group Supervision received)

B. Workshops, Seminars, Training Sessions, or Conferences (Maximum 250 hours)

C. Personal Psychotherapy (Maximum 300 hours)

Additionally, 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

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, 2006. He applied to be an MFT Intern on June 30, 2006. 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.
PART III
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. Counseling Experience
   • Individual Psychotherapy/Counseling (no minimum or maximum)
   • Couples, Families, and Children (minimum 500 hours)
   • Group Psychotherapy/Counseling (maximum 500 hours)
   • Telephone Counseling (maximum 250 hours)
   • Telemedicine Counseling (maximum 125 hours)

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

C. Workshops, Seminars, Training Sessions, or Conferences (maximum 250 hours)

D. Personal Psychotherapy (maximum 300 hours)

E. Supervision (both Individual and Group Supervision Hours)

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.

**Supervision – Counseling Experience Ratios**

The law requires Trainees and Interns to adhere to certain ratios of supervision to counseling work experience. As a Trainee, for every five hours of counseling experience you accrue, you must have one hour of individual or two hours of group supervision. After your school confers your degree and while you are registered as an Intern, you are required to obtain one hour of individual or two hours of group supervision for every 10 hours of counseling work experience.

For a detailed breakdown of qualifying work experience and supervision in chart form, see page 16.

**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.
For example: The BBS receives Susan’s application for MFT examination eligibility on April 27, 2008. The hours of experience Susan gained between April 27, 2002 and April 27, 2008, 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.

**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.
You have completed your hours. You are now ready to submit your MFT licensure 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. 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).

**TIP:** Do not submit an application for MFT licensure 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.
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. 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.
# MFT Breakdown of Required Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPERIENCE TYPE</th>
<th>ALLOWED PRE-DEGREE</th>
<th>ALLOWED POST-DEGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Individual Counseling or Psychotherapy (performed by you)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Couples, Family, and/ or Child Psychotherapy (performed by you)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Group Therapy or Counseling (performed by you)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Telephone Counseling (performed by you)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Telemedicine Counseling (performed by you)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**A Note About Pre-Degree Experience:** A minimum of 150 total hours of experience from categories 1, 2, and 3 above are required pre-degree. A maximum of 750 hours of clinical experience, including direct supervisor contact, can be counted pre-degree.
The combined subtotal for Workshops, Seminars, Training Sessions or Conferences, Personal Psychotherapy Received, and Supervision Hours may not exceed 1,000 hours.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MINIMUMS AND MAXIMUMS</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>Many people gain hundreds of hours in this area due to the limits in other categories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum 500 Hours REQUIRED</td>
<td>May be completed pre- or post-degree or a combination of both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum 500 Hours</td>
<td>May be completed pre- or post-degree or a combination of both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum 250 Hours</td>
<td>May be completed pre- or post-degree or a combination of both.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maximum 125 Hours</td>
<td>May be completed pre-or post-degree or a combination of both.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FOR EXAMPLE:** A trainee earns 625 hours of clinical experience comprising a combination of categories 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5. In addition, the trainee earns 125 hours of individual supervision pre-degree.
### MFT Breakdown of Required Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPERIENCE TYPE</th>
<th>ALLOWED PRE-DEGREE</th>
<th>ALLOWED POST-DEGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6. Supervision, One-on-One*</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Supervision, Group * (No more than eight (8) in a group.)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**NOTE:** A TOTAL MINIMUM of 104 hours of supervision is required. Interns and trainees are required to have a minimum of one hour of individual supervision, OR two hours of group supervision for each week in which experience is claimed for each work setting.

**EXAMPLE:** An intern receives 11 hours of clinical experience and two hours of group supervision (one unit of supervision) the first week, 13 hours of clinical experience and one hour of individual supervision (one unit of supervision) the second week, and 16 hours of clinical experience and four hours of group supervision (two units of supervision) the third week. This totals 40 hours of clinical experience and four units of supervision. The intern has met the required supervision ratio because she has an average, over the three-week period, of 10 hours of clinical experience for every one unit of supervision.
### MINIMUMS AND MAXIMUMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum 52 Hours</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May be completed pre- or post-degree or a combination of both. Note: These may be non-consecutive weeks.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No Minimum or Maximum</th>
<th>NOTES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No pre- or post-degree hours are required to be completed in this area.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Supervision RATIOS for Clinical Experience:**

Hours of Clinical Experience to Units of Supervision

One unit of supervision is equal to one hour of individual or two hours of group supervision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pre-Degree</th>
<th>Post-Degree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Five to One Required</td>
<td>Ten to One Required</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Trainees are required to have a minimum of one unit of supervision for every five hours of client contact in each setting.

Interns are required to have a minimum of one unit of supervision for every ten hours of client contact in each setting.

These ratios can be calculated based on the average number of hours gained over the entire period of time an intern or trainee works in a particular setting (see example at left).
# MFT Breakdown of Required Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPERIENCE TYPE</th>
<th>ALLOWED PRE-DEGREE</th>
<th>ALLOWED POST-DEGREE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7. Attending Workshops, Seminars, Training Sessions, or Conferences</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Psychotherapy (received by you)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Administering and Evaluating Psychological Tests of Counselees, Writing Clinical Reports, Writing Progress Notes, or Writing Process Notes</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**SUPERVISION**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Weeks of Experience REQUIRED</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total Hours of Experience REQUIRED</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### MINIMUMS AND MAXIMUMS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minimum 104 Weeks</th>
<th>Completed pre- and post-degree.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximum 1,300 Hours PRE-DEGREE</td>
<td>1,300 Pre-Degree Hours equal:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 750 hours clinical experience and supervision</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 250 hours workshops, seminars, etc.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• 100 hours (counted as 300) personal psychotherapy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum 3,000 Hours TOTAL</td>
<td>May be completed post-degree only.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Maximum 250 Hours</th>
<th>May be completed pre- or post-degree or a combination of both.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Maximum 100 Hours (times three)</td>
<td>Up to 100 hours may be earned. These hours are triple-counted by the BBS. Hours may be completed pre- or post-degree or a combination of both.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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.
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.