

Board of Behavioral Sciences

Handbook for Future LCSWs

Licensed Clinical Social Workers

We congratulate you on your decision to become a Licensed Clinical Social Worker! The path to licensure as a mental health professional will require your attention to many details. This handbook from the Board of Behavioral Sciences provides a summary of requirements for licensure, as well as tips that will help guide you through the process.

All licensure-related requirements you must meet during this journey are set in law. The laws that govern the licensure process are within the California Business and Professions Code, and Title 16 of the California Code of Regulations. These codes are available in the **Statutes and Regulations** document on the Board’s website: Visit www.bbs.ca.gov, then click on “Statutes & Regulations” on the left side of the blue bar at the bottom of the page.

About The Board Of Behavioral Sciences

The Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS) is the state entity that regulates Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs) in California, as well as individuals gaining hours of supervised experience toward LCSW licensure. BBS also regulates Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs), Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors (LPCCs), and Licensed Educational Psychologists (LEPs). The Board does not regulate students who are gaining a degree in social work.

The Board’s mission is to protect and serve Californians by setting, communicating, and enforcing standards for safe and competent mental health practice. The Board’s vision is to ensure that Californians are able to access the highest-quality mental health services. To this end, the Board develops and administers licensure examinations, investigates consumer complaints and criminal convictions, responds to emerging changes and trends in the mental health profession legislatively or through regulations, and creates informative publications for consumers, applicants, and licensees.

In addition to establishing the requirements to obtain a license or registration, the Board’s statutes and regulations provide the Board the authority to discipline licensees and registrants.

The Importance Of Being Connected With BBS

Throughout your path to licensure, it is critical that you remain up to date on various requirements, as law and process changes occur from time to time. The best way to remain informed is to sign up on our **email subscriber list** (search “BBS email alerts” at www.dca.ca.gov), follow us on social media (Facebook and Twitter), and periodically check our website for updates at www.bbs.ca.gov.

Special Note For Out-Of-State Students

This handbook is designed for applicants attending a California school. If you are obtaining a degree outside of California, we recommend you read the Board’s Guide to **Out-of-State LCSW Applicant**

Requirements: Visit www.bbs.ca.gov, click on “Applicant”, then “LCSW”, choose “Forms/Pubs”, then choose “Publications” and scroll to “Out-of-State Applicants.”

Overview Of The Path To Licensure

Below is an overview of the steps to LCSW licensure. The remainder of this handbook will go into more detail about each of these steps.

As A Student

You will not register with the Board as a student, but you need to make sure you are enrolled in a degree program that California will accept toward licensure. **For more information, see Part 1.**

Additional Coursework

You may need to complete some additional coursework prior to submitting an application to the Board. **For more information, see Part 1.**

Upon Graduation

You will need to submit an application for registration as an Associate Clinical Social Worker (ASW), along with a fee and supporting documents upon graduation. This registration is necessary in order to earn the 3,000 hours of supervised work experience required for licensure. **For more information, see Part 2.**

Gaining Experience Hours Toward Licensure

To gain experience hours that will count toward licensure, you must register as an ASW, be supervised by a qualified supervisor, receive weekly supervision, and meet other legal requirements. **For more information, see Part 3.**

Special Rule On Gaining Hours Prior To Issuance Of Your ASW Number

There is a special rule that may allow you to gain experience hours during the period between graduation and the issue date of your ASW registration number. To gain hours during that period, you must submit an ASW application and fee within 90 days of graduation, and you must have been fingerprinted by the agency where you are gaining hours. **For more information, see Part 2.**

California Law And Ethics Exam And ASW Renewal

Once you are issued an ASW number, it will be valid for six years, though you must renew your number each year. In order to renew, you must pay a renewal fee and take a Law and Ethics Exam. **For more information, see Part 2.**

Applying For Licensure And The Clinical Exam

Once you have gained all of your supervised work experience, completed any required additional coursework, and passed the Law and Ethics Exam, your next step is to submit an Application for Licensure along with a fee and supporting documents. Once BBS approves your application, you may apply to take the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Clinical Exam. Once you pass this exam, you may apply for your initial LCSW license to be issued. **For more information, see Part 4.**

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Part 1: Educational Requirements

Qualifying Degree

Your first step toward becoming a LCSW in California is earning a master’s degree in social work (MSW) from a school accredited by the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE). You can verify your school’s accreditation on CSWE’s website at www.cswe.org.

Additional Coursework Required For ASW Registration

If your degree was earned at a California school: You do not need any additional coursework prior to registration as an ASW.

If your degree was earned from an out-of-state school: You must complete a 12-hour course in California Law and Ethics prior to registration as an ASW.

Additional Coursework Required For LCSW Licensure

Before you can be approved to take the clinical licensure exam, you must complete the courses listed here. You can complete this coursework as part of your MSW degree or outside of your degree.

Tip: Many California MSW programs already fulfill the coursework requirements, but some do not. Check with your school to be sure.

Course	Required Of	Length	Content Required
Child Abuse Assessment and Reporting in California	All applicants	Seven hours	Title 16, California Code of Regulations (16 CCR) section 1807.2; course must be based on California law
Human Sexuality	All applicants	10 hours	16 CCR section 1807
Alcoholism and Chemical Substance Abuse and Dependency	All applicants	15 hours	16 CCR section 1810

Aging, Long Term Care, and Elder/Dependent Adult Abuse	All applicants	10 hours	Business and Professions Code (BPC) section 4996.25(a)
Spousal/Partner Abuse Assessment, Detection, and Intervention	All applicants	15 hours	BPC section 4996.2(f)
California Cultures and the Social and Psychological Implications of Socioeconomic Position (OUT-OF-STATE ONLY)	All applicants with out-of-state education	15 hours or one semester unit	BPC section 4996.17.2
Suicide Risk Assessment and Intervention	Required of those submitting an Application for Licensure on or after January 1, 2021 (otherwise will be required upon license renewal)	Six hours of coursework or applied experience (If six hours of suicide risk assessment and intervention training was included within your qualifying degree program, you will need to obtain a written certification from the registrar or training director of your school or program stating that this coursework was included within the curriculum required for graduation, or within the coursework that was completed by you. You won't need to submit proof of completion until you submit an Application for Licensure.)	BPC section 4996.27

Tip: Keep the syllabus for any course you took that you believe fulfilled the requirements. This may be needed to verify course content.

Only coursework that meets the criteria specified by law will be accepted, including being taken from an acceptable provider. For more information, see the Board's Statutes and Regulations.

Course Provider Qualifications

You can take the required courses from any of the following:

An educational institution approved by the California Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education.

A continuing education provider accepted by the Board.

A course sponsored, offered, or approved by a professional association or a state, county, or local department of health or mental health.

Part 2: Associate Clinical Social Worker Registration And The California Law And Ethics Exam

Registering As An ASW And The 90-Day Rule

Upon graduation, you may apply to become an ASW and begin gaining hours of supervised work experience toward licensure.

You won't be able to begin accruing hours until your ASW number has been issued unless you are able to meet the requirements of the 90-Day Rule. The 90-Day Rule allows an applicant to count experience from the date of graduation if all of the following requirements are met:

- You must apply for your ASW registration within 90 days of graduation.
- You must have been fingerprinted by the agency where you would be gaining hours.
- That agency may not be a private practice or professional corporation..
- You must retain a copy of your completed Live Scan fingerprint form completed for that agency and submit it when you apply for licensure.

For full details, see the **90-Day Rule FAQ** on the Board's website: Visit www.bbs.ca.gov, then click on "Applicant" on the top bar, then "LCSW," then "Register as an ASW" and scroll down to "90-Day Rule/Fingerprinting."

Once issued, your ASW number will be posted to the BreEZe system online at www.breeze.ca.gov. Soon after, you will receive your ASW registration certificate in the mail.

Tip: Before you graduate, take a look at the Application for ASW Registration available on the Board's website so you will have an idea of what you will need to submit to the Board upon graduation.

Working As An ASW

ASWs must comply with all of the following:

- Must work under a qualified supervisor.
- Must work as a W-2 employee or volunteer.
- May not practice independently.
- May not work in a private practice or professional corporation setting until an ASW registration number has been issued by the Board.

Other requirements pertaining to working as an ASW can be found in Part 3 of this handbook, in the **FAQs for ASWs** (visit www.bbs.ca.gov, then click on “Applicant” on the top bar, then click “LCSW,” then “Forms/Pubs,” choose “Publications,” then click on the document under “Supervision”), and in the Board’s **Statutes and Regulations** (visit www.bbs.ca.gov, then click on “Statutes & Regulations” on the left side of the blue bar at the bottom of the page).

Maintaining Your ASW Registration And The Law And Ethics Exam

ASW registrations expire annually and have a total six-year time limit. Your registration’s expiration date will be printed on your registration certificate. The Board will mail you a courtesy renewal notice 90 days prior to your expiration date, but it is your responsibility to renew regardless of whether the notice is received, just like a driver’s license.

To renew each year, you must pay a renewal fee and meet the California Law and Ethics Exam requirement. To meet the exam requirement, you must take the exam prior to your registration’s expiration date. The Board recommends that you apply to take the exam as soon as your ASW registration has been issued and take the exam well in advance of your expiration date to ensure your ability to renew on time.

If you wait until the last minute to take the exam, you risk delaying your ability to renew. Your employer is unlikely to allow you to work with an expired registration, and you won’t be able to count any experience hours toward licensure during the time your registration lapsed.

If you don’t pass the exam during your first renewal period (you may take it once every 90 days), you will need to take it again during the next renewal period before you renew again. At minimum, you must take the Law and Ethics Exam once per year until you have passed it.

See the “Exams” tab of the Board’s website for more information about the Law and Ethics Exam, including a link to the Law and Ethics Exam Candidate Handbook, which contains the exam’s content outline.

Once your registration’s six-year time limit runs out, you may apply for a subsequent ASW registration number, but you will no longer be permitted to work in a private practice setting. In order to qualify for a subsequent ASW number, you must have passed the Law and Ethics Exam.

Tip: Take the Law and Ethics Exam well in advance of your expiration date to ensure your ability to renew on time.

Part 3: Supervised Work Experience Requirements

You will need 104 weeks of supervision and 3,000 hours of supervised work experience that meet all requirements as specified in law before applying for licensure. Here are some important tips to help ensure the hours you gain will count toward licensure:

- **Always renew your ASW registration on time.** Take your Law and Ethics Exam early and submit your renewal fee on time to ensure your registration does not expire. Hours earned under an expired ASW registration will not count and your employer may not allow you to work.
- **Keep track of important documents.** This includes supervision-related forms such as Experience Verification forms, which you will need to submit with original signatures when you apply for licensure, or your hours will not count. If you are claiming hours under the 90-Day Rule, you must retain a copy of your Live Scan fingerprint form. You should also retain your signed weekly logs, but they are not submitted to the Board except upon request.
- **Gain a thorough understanding of supervision-related requirements.** It's critical that you gain a thorough understanding of all requirements pertaining to supervision. Your supervisor must meet certain requirements and your supervised experience must meet certain requirements for your hours to count toward licensure. There are many details to these requirements, all of which are set in law and cannot be waived. The resources at the end of this handbook will help you in this endeavor.
- **Meet with your supervisor every week.** You must have at least one hour of individual or triadic supervision, or two hours of group supervision in order to count work experience during that week. If you provided more than 10 hours of direct clinical counseling that week, you must have additional supervision that week.
- **Understand the categories of acceptable experience.** Review the LCSW Breakdown of Required Experience that follows, including the different category minimums and maximums.
- **Understand pertinent employment laws.** For example, make sure that you are working as a W-2 employee or volunteer and not as an independent contractor; if your supervisor is not employed by your employer, a written oversight agreement must be in place.
- **Understand the Six-Year Rule.** All work experience must be accrued no more than six years before the date the BBS receives your Application for Licensure. For example, if your application was received on April 3, 2022, only the experience gained between April 3, 2016, and April 3, 2022, would count.

These are just some of the rules that pertain to supervised experience. It's important that you gain a full understanding of all requirements to ensure a smooth path to licensure. The resources in Part 5 of this handbook will assist you in doing so.

Supervisor Qualifications

Only licensed mental health professionals who meet certain requirements can supervise experience that will count toward licensure. Licensed mental health professionals include any of the following:

- **Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs)**

- **Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs)**
- **Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors (LPCCs)**
- **Licensed Clinical Psychologists**
- **Licensed Educational Psychologists (LEP)** (*Note: LEPs may only supervise up to 1,200 hours, which must consist of educationally related mental health services that are consistent with the LEP scope of practice described in BPC section 4989.14).*
- **Licensed Physicians Certified in Psychiatry by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology.**

Your supervisor must be licensed and practicing for at least two of the past five years, must complete supervision training, maintain a current and active California license that is not under suspension or probation, and meet additional requirements. You can check your supervisor's license status any time at <https://search.dca.ca.gov>.

Required Forms

While gaining your hours of experience you must use the following forms, available under the "Applicant" tab of the Board's website. These forms may change in the future, so be sure to stay up to date on current requirements.

Supervision Agreement: You and your supervisor must sign this form within 60 days of commencing supervision. It includes a supervisory plan to be collaboratively developed by you and your supervisor. Retain for future submission with your Application for Licensure. Note: This requirement applies to new supervisory relationships that formed on or after January 1, 2022. For prior supervisory relationships, you must have a completed Responsibility Statement for Supervisors and a Supervisory Plan, which you will retain for submission with your Application for Licensure.

The Index of Legal Citations provides a code reference for each item in the Supervision Agreement.

[Click here to access the Supervision Agreement.](#)

Weekly Summary of Experience Hours (Weekly Log): Log your hours on this form on a weekly basis and have your supervisor sign weekly. You will retain the original logs. Do not submit Weekly Logs to the Board except upon request.

[Click here to access Weekly Tracking Log form.](#)

Experience Verification: This form is completed upon the termination of your supervised experience with your supervisor and must indicate the total hours completed in each category under your supervisor, your supervisor's license information, and information about your employer. Your supervisor will sign the form and provide you with the original for submission with your Application for Licensure.

[Click here to access In-State Experience Verification form.](#)

Written Oversight Agreement: When your supervisor is not employed by your employer or is a volunteer, your employer and supervisor must sign an agreement that specifies certain responsibilities of each party. An example agreement is available under the "Applicant" tab of the Board's website. Be sure to retain a copy for future submission with your Application for Licensure.

[Click here to access the Written Oversight Agreement.](#)

For More Information On Supervised Experience Requirements

All of the requirements in this section are explained in greater detail within the FAQs for ASWs (visit www.bbs.ca.gov, then click on “Applicant” on the top bar, then click “LCSW,” then “Forms/Pubs,” choose “Publications,” then click on the document under “Supervision”) and in the Board’s Statutes and Regulations (visit www.bbs.ca.gov, then click on “Statutes & Regulations” on the left side of the blue bar at the bottom of the page).

Breakdown Of Required Experience For Licensure

Experience Type	Minimum	Maximum	Notes
Clinical Social Work Services <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Clinical Psychosocial Diagnosis• Assessment• Treatment• Individual or Group Psychotherapy	2,000 hours <i>(750 of those hours must be in face-to-face individual or group psychotherapy)</i>	None	
Nonclinical Services <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Client-Centered Advocacy• Consultation, Evaluation, Research• Workshops, Seminars, Training Sessions or Conferences• Direct Supervisor Contact	None	1,000	

Experience Type	Minimum	Maximum	Notes
Supervision, Individual and/or Triadic	52 weeks with one hour of individual/triadic direct supervisor contact per week <i>(13 of those weeks must be supervised by an LCSW)</i>	No more than six hours of supervision may be credited in a single week	Two units of supervision are required for any week in which more than 10 hours of face-to-face psychotherapy is performed in each setting (One unit of supervision equals one hour of individual or triadic supervision or two hours of group supervision.)
Supervision, Group (<i>Maximum of eight in the group</i>)	None	Same as above	Same as above
Total Weeks of Supervised Experience Required	104 supervised weeks	None	Each week must contain a minimum of one unit of supervision (One unit of supervision equals one hour of individual or triadic supervision or two hours of group supervision.)
Total Hours of Supervised Experience Required	3,000 hours (A minimum of 1,700 hours must be under the supervision of an LCSW. All other hours may be under another qualified mental health professional, though there are restrictions if the supervisor is an LEP.)	None	A maximum of 40 hours credited in any week

Part 4: Applying For Licensure And The Clinical Exam

Qualifying For Licensure: The Process

After you have completed your supervised experience, any additional coursework (if required), and have passed the California Law and Ethics Exam, you may submit an Application for Licensure. The Board will notify you once your application has been evaluated and will provide instructions on how to proceed if approved, or how to clear up any deficiencies if not approved.

The Clinical Exam

Once your Application for Licensure has been approved, you may sign up to take the Association of Social Work Boards (ASWB) Clinical Exam. You must take the exam within one year from the date your Application for Licensure is approved. The “Exams” tab of the Board’s website includes a link to the ASWB Candidate Handbook, which contains the exam’s content outline.

If You Fail The Clinical Exam

You can retake the exam after the waiting period specified in the Candidate Handbook. You will have a one-year deadline to retake the exam from the date of your last attempt. If you don’t meet this one-year deadline your application is considered abandoned and you will be required to submit a new Application for Licensure.

Once You Pass The Clinical Exam

Upon passing the clinical exam, you may apply to have your LCSW license issued by submitting an Application for Initial License Issuance and fee. Allow up to 30 days for processing. Once issued, your LCSW license number will be posted to the BreEZe system online at www.breeze.ca.gov and you will receive the actual wall license and certificate in the mail. You may not practice independently until your license has been issued.

Maintaining Your License

Your LCSW license will expire every two years. Each two-year renewal cycle, you will need to complete 36 hours of continuing education, including six hours specific to law and ethics, and pay a renewal fee.

Tip: Once you are licensed, pay close attention to your specific continuing education (CE) requirements, and make sure your courses are taken from an acceptable provider. The Board audits for CE periodically, and you can be fined if your courses do not meet the requirements.

Part 5: Resources

BBS Website

www.bbs.ca.gov

BBS Email Subscriber List

www.dca.ca.gov/webapps/bbs/subscribe.php

(search “BBS email alerts” at www.dca.ca.gov)

BBS Facebook

www.facebook.com/BehavioralSciencesBoardCA

BBS Twitter

https://twitter.com/BBS_California

BBS Newsletter

www.bbs.ca.gov/resources/general.html

National Association Of Social Workers—California Chapter

www.naswca.org/default.aspx

California Society For Clinical Social Work

www.clinicalsocialworksociety.org

National Association Of Social Workers—National

www.socialworkers.org

Association Of Social Work Boards

www.aswb.org

Financial Aid And Loan Repayment Programs

www.bbs.ca.gov/resources/general.html

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