

Board Of Behavioral Sciences

Handbook for Future LMFTs

Licensed Marriage And Family Therapists

We congratulate you on your decision to become a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist! 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 Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs) in California, as well as individuals gaining hours of supervised experience toward LMFT licensure. BBS also regulates Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs), Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors (LPCCs), and Licensed Educational Psychologists (LEPs). The Board also regulates certain aspects of degree programs that are designed to lead to licensure.

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 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.

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 based on the requirements that must be met by individuals obtaining a degree from a California school. If you are obtaining a degree that is not designed for California licensure but would like to become licensed in California, we recommend that you read the Board's **Guide to Out-of-State**

LMFT Applicant Requirements: Visit www.bbs.ca.gov, click on the “LMFT” button in the middle of the homepage, choose “Get a License,” click on “Out-of-State Applicants,” then scroll to the document.

Overview Of The Path To Licensure

Below is an overview of the steps to LMFT 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, even though you are allowed to gain some hours of supervised experience toward licensure as an MFT Trainee once you have completed 12 semester units or 18 quarter units in your degree program. California law sets forth the requirements for licensure related to your degree, practicum, and supervised work experience, so it’s important that you pay careful attention to meeting those requirements. **For more information, see Parts 1 and 2.**

Additional Coursework

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

Upon Graduation—Gaining Post-Degree Experience Hours

You will need to submit an application for registration as an Associate Marriage and Family Therapist (Associate or AMFT), along with a fee and supporting documents in order to earn post-degree supervised experience toward licensure. You must be supervised by a qualified supervisor, receive weekly supervision, and meet other legal requirements. **For more information, see Parts 3 and 4.**

Special Rule On Gaining Post-Degree Hours Prior To Issuance Of Your AMFT Number

To continue gaining hours after you graduate, you need to be registered as an AMFT. However, there is a special rule that may allow you to gain experience hours during the period between graduation and the issue date of your AMFT number. To gain hours during that period, you must submit an AMFT 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 3.**

California Law And Ethics Exam And AMFT Renewal

Once you are issued an AMFT 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 3.**

Applying For Licensure And The Clinical Exam

Once you have gained your 3,000 hours of 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 for Licensure, you may apply to take the LMFT Clinical Exam. Once you pass this exam, you may apply for your initial LMFT license to be issued. **For more information, see Part 5.**

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Part 1: Educational Requirements

Qualifying Degree

Your first step toward becoming a LMFT in California is earning a qualifying master's or doctoral degree from one of the following types of schools:

- An educational institution accredited by a regional or national institutional accrediting agency that is recognized by the United States Department of Education.
- An educational institution approved by the California Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education.
- An educational institution accredited by the Commission on Accreditation for Marriage and Family Therapy Education (COAMFTE).

Your degree program must meet the qualifications specified in law in order to qualify for licensure. Each educational institution preparing applicants to qualify for registration or licensure must notify each of its students by means of its public documents or otherwise in writing that its degree program is designed to meet the requirements of section 4980.36 of the California Business and Professions Code (BPC).

The requirements set forth in the BPC include acceptable degree titles, specific content that must be covered, the number of units, and practicum requirements. The basic requirements are:

- The degree must contain an overall 60 semester units or 72 quarter units.
- The degree title must be one of the following:
 - Marriage, family, and child counseling.
 - Marriage and family therapy.
 - Couple and family therapy.
 - Psychology.
 - Clinical psychology.
 - Counseling psychology.
 - Counseling or clinical mental health counseling with an emphasis in either marriage, family, and child counseling or marriage and family therapy.

- The degree must contain no less than 12 semester or 18 quarter units of coursework in theories, principles, and methods of a variety of psychotherapeutic orientations directly related to marriage and family therapy and marital and family systems approaches to treatment and how these theories can be applied therapeutically with individuals, couples, families, adults (including elder adults), children, adolescents, and groups to improve, restore, or maintain healthy relationships.
- The degree must contain all of the course content specified in BPC section 4980.36.
- The degree must meet certain practicum requirements.

Practicum

Qualifying degree programs must include a minimum of six semester or nine quarter units of practicum in a supervised clinical placement that provides supervised fieldwork experience. The practicum must include:

- A minimum of 150 hours of face-to-face experience counseling individuals, couples, families, or groups.
- And an additional 75 hours of either of the following (or a combination thereof):
 - Client-centered advocacy (includes, but is not limited to, researching, identifying, and accessing resources, or other activities related to obtaining or providing services and supports for clients or groups of clients receiving psychotherapy or counseling services).
 - Additional face-to-face counseling experience.

For more information about practicum requirements, see Part 2.

Suicide Risk Assessment And Intervention Training

Before you can be approved to take the clinical licensure exam, you must complete six hours of coursework or gain six hours of applied experience in suicide risk assessment and intervention. You won't need to submit proof of completion until you submit an Application for Licensure.

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.

If the six hours is obtained as part of your applied experience, it can be met during practicum or while registered as an AMFT. To satisfy this requirement, you must obtain a written certification from the director of training for the program or your primary supervisor where the qualifying experience occurred stating that the training was included within your applied experience.

If you need to take a course, it must be from one of the following providers:

An educational institution accredited by a regional or national institutional accrediting agency that is recognized by the United States Department of Education, including extension courses.

An educational institution approved by the California Bureau for Private Postsecondary Education, including extension courses.

A continuing education provider accepted by the Board.

Part 2: Marriage And Family Therapist Trainees Practicum And Pre-Degree Experience Requirements

An MFT Trainee is an individual who is enrolled in a degree program that is designed to qualify the person for LMFT licensure who has completed no less than 12 semester units or 18 quarter units of coursework in that degree program. An MFT Trainee can begin earning hours of supervised experience toward licensure within certain parameters.

Supervised Experience As A Trainee

As a Trainee, you are permitted to earn a maximum of 1,300 hours of supervised work experience toward licensure before your degree is awarded. Of the 1,300 hours, you are limited to claiming up to 750 hours of counseling and direct supervisor contact (combined). The remaining 550 hours may only consist of nonclinical experience.

Trainee Experience Type	Minimum	Maximum
<p>1. Face-to-Face/Direct Counseling Experience Individuals, Groups Couples, Families</p>	<p>150 hours of Practicum</p>	<p>Combined Maximum Of 750 Hours Note: No more than six hours of supervision may be credited in a single week</p>
<p>2. Supervision Individual Triadic Group One unit of supervision equals one hour of individual or triadic supervision or two hours of group supervision</p>	<p>Each Week: One unit of supervision is required in each work setting Weekly Ratio: One unit of supervision is required for every five hours of direct clinical counseling provided in a single week in each setting (Trainees can calculate ratios based on the average number of hours gained over the entire period of time a Trainee</p>	

	works in a particular setting.)	
3. Nonclinical Practice Administering and evaluating psychological tests Writing clinical reports, progress notes or process notes Client-centered advocacy Workshops, seminars, training sessions or conferences	None	1,300 Hours Minus All Face-to-Face Counseling and Supervision Hours

Example Trainee Supervision Ratio Number 1

A Trainee works one job and provides 16 hours of direct clinical counseling during a single week. This Trainee must receive four units of supervision during that week (three of those units may be averaged over other weeks).

Example Trainee Supervision Ratio Number 2

A Trainee works two jobs and provides four hours of direct clinical counseling at Job A, and seven hours at Job B during a single week. This Trainee must receive three units of supervision during that week (one unit at Job A and two units at Job B; one of the units at Job B may be averaged over other weeks).

Responsibilities Of Your School And Work Site

All hours of experience gained as a Trainee shall be coordinated between the school and the site where the hours are being accrued. The school shall approve each site and shall have a written agreement with each site that details each party's responsibilities, including the methods by which supervision shall be provided. The agreement shall provide for regular progress reports and evaluations of the student's performance at the site.

Trainees must work as a W-2 employee or as a volunteer. Trainees are prohibited from working in a private practice or professional corporation setting. All other settings are acceptable if they comply with all of the following:

The school in which the Trainee is enrolled must approve the site and have a written agreement with the site that details each party's responsibilities.

The setting must lawfully and regularly provide mental health counseling or psychotherapy.

The setting must provide oversight to ensure that the Trainee's work at the setting meets experience and supervision requirements and is within the scope of practice for the profession.

Practicum Requirements For Trainees Providing Counseling Services

All counseling services provided by you as a Trainee must constitute part of your supervised course of study while enrolled in practicum. However, a Trainee may provide counseling services while not enrolled in practicum if both of the following are met:

The period of lapsed enrollment is less than 90 calendar days.

The 90-day (or shorter) period is immediately preceded by enrollment in practicum and immediately followed by enrollment in practicum (or completion of the degree program).

For example, if your practicum course ended May 29 and you are not taking a summer practicum course, you may see clients for the next 90 days provided you are enrolled in another practicum course that starts by August 27, or you graduate by August 27. If a Trainee's practicum break is 90 days or greater, the Trainee cannot count any hours gained during that time period toward licensure.

For More Information

For more information about supervised experience requirements, including how to log your hours, the licensees who are qualified to supervise your hours toward licensure, and more, **see Part 4.**

Part 3: Associate Marriage And Family Therapist Registration And The California Law And Ethics Exam

Registering As An AMFT And The 90-Day Rule

Upon graduation, you may apply to become an Associate Marriage and Family Therapist (AMFT). You won't be able to begin accruing post-degree hours toward licensure until your AMFT number has been issued unless you are able to meet the terms of the 90-Day Rule. As previously mentioned, you do not need to be registered with the Board to count pre-degree hours.

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 AMFT 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; and
- 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 click “LMFT,” then “Register as an AMFT,” and scroll down to “90-Day Rule/Fingerprinting.”

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

Working As An AMFT

AMFTs must comply with all of the following:

- AMFTs must work under a qualified supervisor;
- AMFTs must work as a W-2 employee or as a volunteer;
- AMFTs may not practice independently; and
- AMFTs may not work in a private practice or professional corporation setting until an AMFT registration number has been issued by the Board.

Other requirements pertaining to working as an AMFT can be found in Part 4 of this handbook, in the **FAQs for AMFTs and Trainees**—visit www.bbs.ca.gov, click on “Applicant” in the top bar, then choose “LMFT,” then “Forms/Pubs,” scroll down to “Publications” and then to the “Supervision” heading—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 AMFT Registration And The Law And Ethics Exam

AMFT 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.

Tip: Before you graduate, take a look at the Application for AMFT 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.

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 AMFT 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 on the Board’s website—visit www.bbs.ca.gov, click on the “Exams” tab at the top of the page, then choose “LMFT”—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 AMFT registration number, but you will no longer be permitted to work in a private practice or professional corporation setting. In order to qualify for a subsequent AMFT number, you must have passed the Law and Ethics Exam.

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

Part 4: Supervised Work Experience Requirements

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

- **Always renew your AMFT 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 AMFT 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 post-degree hours under the 90-Day Rule, you must retain a copy of your agency’s 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 a minimum of one hour of individual or triadic supervision, or two hours of group supervision in order to count work experience during that week. Be sure that you are also meeting the required ratios for supervision of direct clinical counseling hours.
- **Understand the categories of acceptable experience.** Review the LMFT Breakdown of Required Experience on the next page, 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, and, 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.

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 Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs)**
- **Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSWs)**
- **Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors (LPCCs)** (*must have met education and experience requirements that allow the LPCC to treat couples and families*)
- **Licensed Clinical Psychologists**
- **Licensed Educational Psychologists (LEPs)** (*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.

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 6 of this handbook will assist you in doing so.

Your supervisor must be licensed and practicing for at least two of the past five years, 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 at the top 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, 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 Log of Experience Hours: 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 Log of Experience Hours 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 the 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 AMFTs and Trainees—visit www.bbs.ca.gov, then click on “Applicant” in the top bar, then click “LMFT,” 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
Direct Clinical Counseling Experience <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Individuals• Groups• Couples• Families	1,750 hours <i>A minimum of 500 of those hours must be gained diagnosing and treating couples, families, and children</i>	None	See Part 2 for information on maximum hours allowed as a Trainee.
Nonclinical Practice <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Direct supervisor contact• Administering and evaluating psychological tests• Writing clinical reports, progress notes, or process notes• Client-centered advocacy	None	1,250 hours	See Part 2 for information on maximum hours allowed as a Trainee.

• Workshops, seminars, training sessions or conferences			
Supervision, Individual and/or Triadic	52 weeks that contain one hour of individual/triadic direct supervisor contact each week	A maximum of six hours of supervision may be credited in a single week	Supervision Ratios: Trainees: An average of one unit of supervision is required for every five hours of direct clinical counseling provided each week in each setting. (One unit of supervision equals one hour of individual or triadic supervision or two hours of group supervision.) Associates: 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.)
Experience Type	Minimum	Maximum	Notes
Supervision, Group (Maximum of eight in the group)	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	Pre-degree: Maximum 1,300 hours	A maximum of 40 hours credited in any week
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Part 5: 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 LMFT California 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 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.

Tip: Keep track of your one-year deadline for taking or retaking the clinical exam. If you miss your deadline, you will have to reapply for licensure and pay another application fee!

Once You Pass The Clinical Exam

Upon passing the clinical exam, you may apply to have your LMFT license issued by submitting an Application for Initial License Issuance. Allow up to 30 days for processing. Once issued, your LMFT 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 LMFT license will expire every two years. Each two-year renewal cycle, you will need to complete 36 hours of continuing education (CE), 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 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 6: 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

California Association Of Marriage And Family Therapists

www.camft.org/

American Association For Marriage And Family Therapy

www.aamft.org/

Financial Aid And Loan Repayment Programs

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

Board of Behavioral Sciences

State of California Department of Consumer Affairs

Rev: 1/22

PDE_21-288