



Access & Value

Alberta Psychology Information Toolkit for Use with Elected Officials

Psychologists'
Association of
Alberta

Psychology & Psychotherapy in Alberta


Honourable Jason Kenney
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Working Together

As a lifelong Albertan, I commend you on your recent election and commitment to leadership in bettering our province. We need you to champion Alberta's remarkable potential.

As a clinical psychologist and CEO of the Psychologists' Association of Alberta (PAA) I want to thank you for taking the time to learn more about how psychology is improving the health and wellness of Albertans and how psychology will be an asset to you in your role as an elected official.

We wanted to take this opportunity to share some highlights about our profession in relation to your goals as an elected leader but also to share psychological tips on how to deal with distressed constituents. Together, we serve all Albertans.



Dr Judi L Malone

Chief Executive Officer, PAA

Registered Psychologist (AB/AUS)

Certified Association Executive

Overcome obstacles <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VAqfMW5zCcs>



PAA acknowledges that Alberta is located on Treaty territory traditional lands – a traditional gathering place for diverse indigenous peoples whose histories, languages, & cultures continue to influence our vibrant community. PAA is dedicated to ensuring the spirit of all Treaty's is honoured and respected.

PAA is the voice of, & for, psychology in Alberta. Our mission is to advance the science-based profession of psychology & to promote the well-being & potential of all Albertans

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The Value of Psychologists

What we do really works.

1 in 5 Albertans will experience a mental health problem in each year. The most common of these are depression & anxiety.

Psychologists are key to interdisciplinary health care delivery

Registered psychologists are qualified to make a proper assessment, diagnosis, & to provide evidence-based treatment through years of rigorous education, training & licensure. Most importantly, psychologists engage in outcome-informed practices - we provide evidence-based practices and track what is working.

80% of people treated by a psychologist have better outcomes than similar untreated people – that is as good as coronary bypass surgery outcomes.

Psychological treatment decreases medical costs of care & improves treatment outcomes but also contributes to the psychological health & wellness of all Albertans.

Through a scientific base of knowledge, psychologists have contributed greatly to understanding human behavior, alleviating pain and suffering, and to human health and well-being.

We are scientist-practitioners & we track the benefits of services provided, regularly engage in research, & provide evidence-based services. This practice also identifies at risk clients & helps us to identify early clients who may have negative outcome to treatment, zero outcome to treatment, or drop out.

- Psychological treatments have proven effective for a wide range of mental health disorders, as well as the management of chronic health problems & conditions such as heart disease & chronic pain.
- Psychological treatments are less expensive than, & at least as effective as medication for several common mental health conditions.
- People with depression who are treated with psychological therapy tend to relapse less frequently than those treated with medication.
- Successful treatment with psychological therapies results in decreased use of other health care services, with the costs of treatment being more than mitigated by reduced costs attached to those services.
- Psychotherapy works as well or better for people with severe depression as it does for people with its milder form.
- When combined with medication for bipolar disorder, patients function better & relapse less than when they receive medication alone.
- More recent research suggests that combining psychotherapy with medication enhances treatment compliance, reduces the subjective burden of disease & is associated with lower suicide rates.

When asked what health professionals Albertans think are best able to care for people living with depression & anxiety disorders, they responded family doctor, psychologist, & psychiatrist as the top 3 responses; for addictions those automatic responses were counsellor, psychologist, & family doctor.

Many Albertans experience a need for mental health care;
but not all of those needs are met despite evidence that mental illness can be
successfully treated.

Psychology's Unique Value

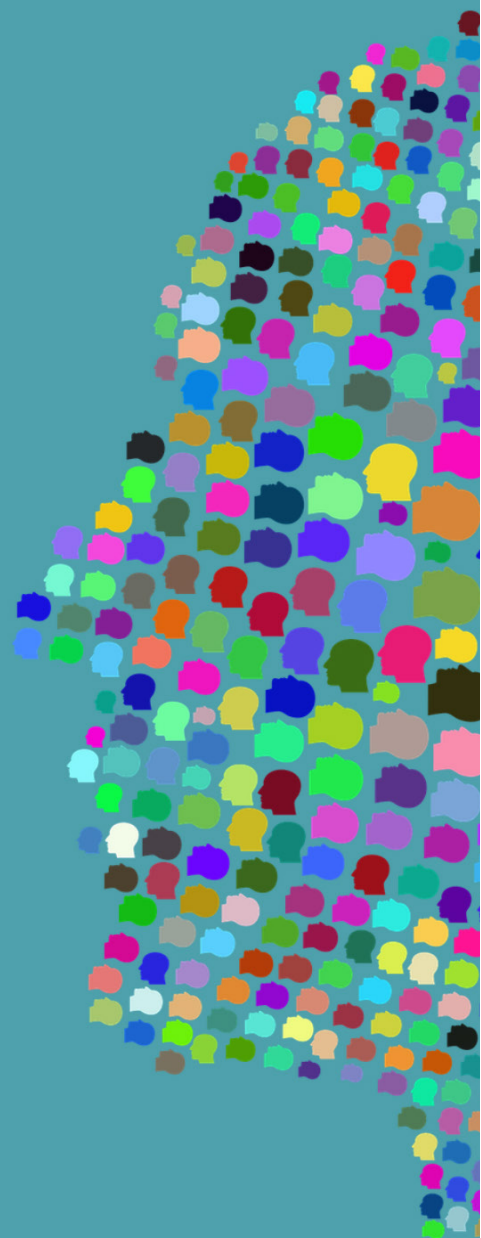
Psychologists are regulated health professionals who provide services including psychotherapy, assessment, diagnosis, consultation, and research of psychological health and problems.

Psychologists provide value given their focused education and training in cognition, emotions and behaviour, and how to affect behavioural changes -- that makes psychologists unique.

Psychologists are trained in evidence-based practices and follow a code of ethics that promotes respect for dignity and fair treatment of all Albertans. Alberta's psychologists have advanced university degrees (Masters or Doctoral) and undergo extensive supervised training and examinations.

Psychologists study the biological, cognitive, emotional, social, cultural, and environmental determinants of behaviour and through such extensive research and practice, psychologists help people cope more effectively in daily life.

FOR MORE INFO, PLEASE VISIT
WWW.PSYCHOLOGISTSASSOCIATION.AB.CA



Access is Key

Access to psychologists has significant cost-recovery & health outcomes. Alberta has a medical-care, rather than a health-care system. Cost is a barrier to access as there are few publicly funded psychological services.

Many employee benefit plans have little / insufficient coverage for psychological services. In Alberta, most psychological services can only be accessed privately as few are funded with public health care insurance. Cost is a barrier to access & those with additional health benefits are most able to access psychological services.

In Alberta, we have sufficient psychologists – the issue is not availability, it is ability to access due to unnecessary financial barriers.

Access to psychologists for psychotherapy has significant cost-recovery & health outcomes. Psychological treatment decreases medical costs of care & improves treatment outcomes but also contributes to the psychological health & wellness of all Albertans.

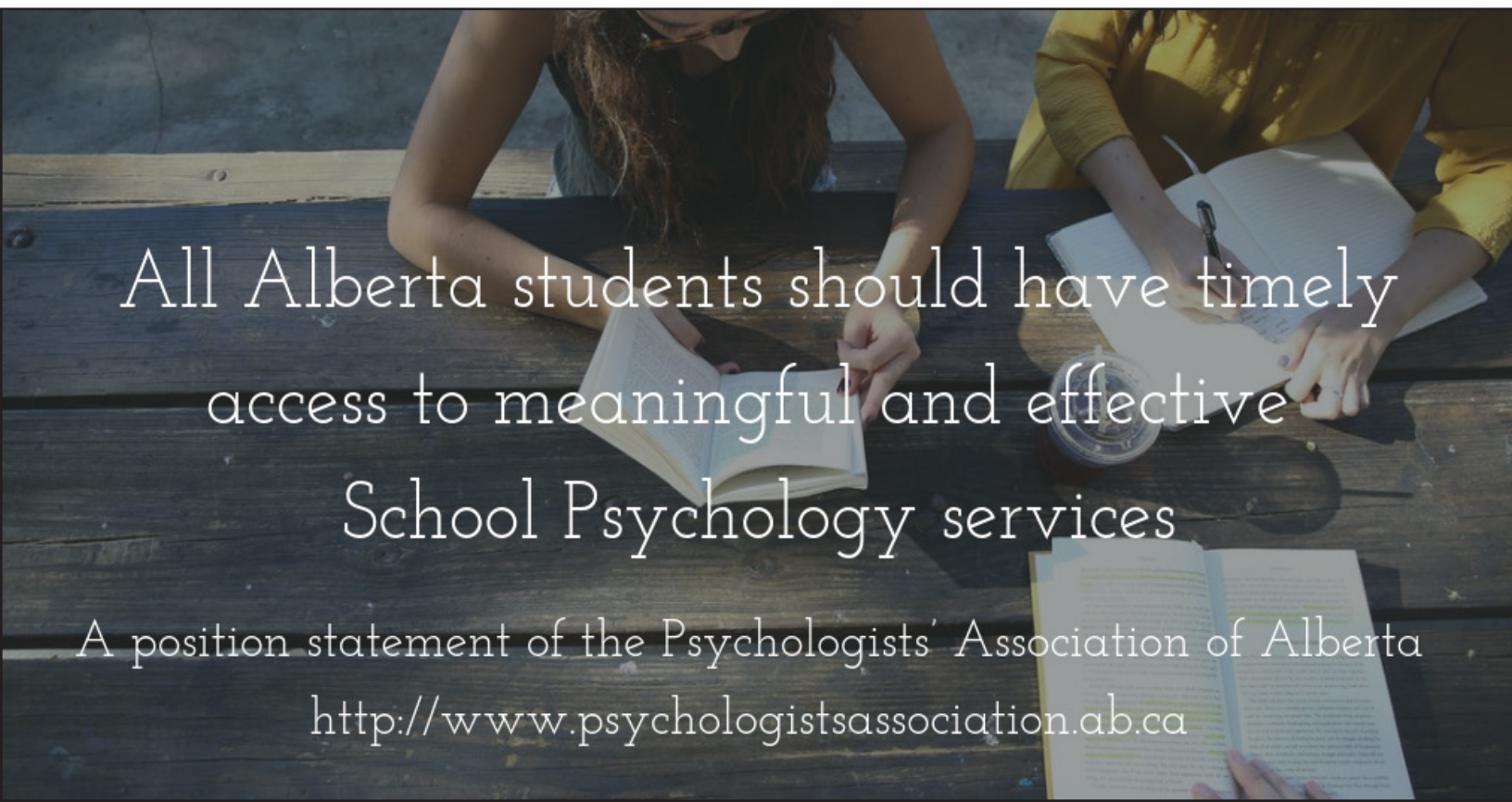
Publicly funded mental health services are not funded on parity with physical health services based on the burden of disease. Recent & extensive research has consistently demonstrated that access to psychologists is the number one reported unmet need in addiction & mental health reform. This is an area that requires action rather than further study. Within our current system Albertans are able to access medication but not necessary psychotherapy. Community support networks & sufficient family supports foster the psychological health & wellness of Albertans.

Albertans face significant barriers in accessing psychological care; 80% reporting that they needed to pay for psychological services themselves, representing a significant or very significant barrier.

Crafting an Alberta Solution

Quebec is leading the way, but an Alberta advantage would be to build on their initiative targeting our needs. The Quebec provincial health program is investing \$35 million in mental health to launch the first public psychotherapy program, mostly replicate the British program Improving Access to psychological therapies. Quebec's investment aims to establish the service, develop a reference framework, upgrade training of health professionals as well as set up a registry of recognized psychotherapists targeting mental health alone (mainly depression & anxiety). Their decision was based on government recommendations to provide equitable access to psychotherapy services to improve public health & was based on a demonstrated cost-savings of 20-30% of the cost of medical services.

In Quebec additional funding was set aside specifically for psychological treatment acknowledging a demonstrated cost-savings of 20-30% of the cost of medical treatment for anxiety, depression, & serious mental illness.

A photograph of two students, a young woman with long brown hair and a young man in a yellow shirt, sitting at a dark wooden table outdoors. They are both looking down at open books, appearing to be studying. The woman is on the left, and the man is on the right. The background is a blurred outdoor setting.

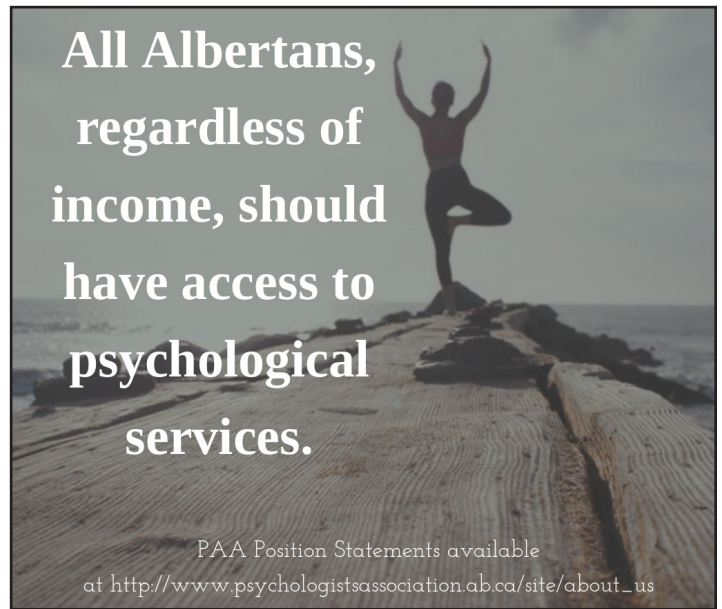
All Alberta students should have timely
access to meaningful and effective
School Psychology services

A position statement of the Psychologists' Association of Alberta
<http://www.psychologistsassociation.ab.ca>

Easy Solutions

- Do not require medical referral to access psychological benefits

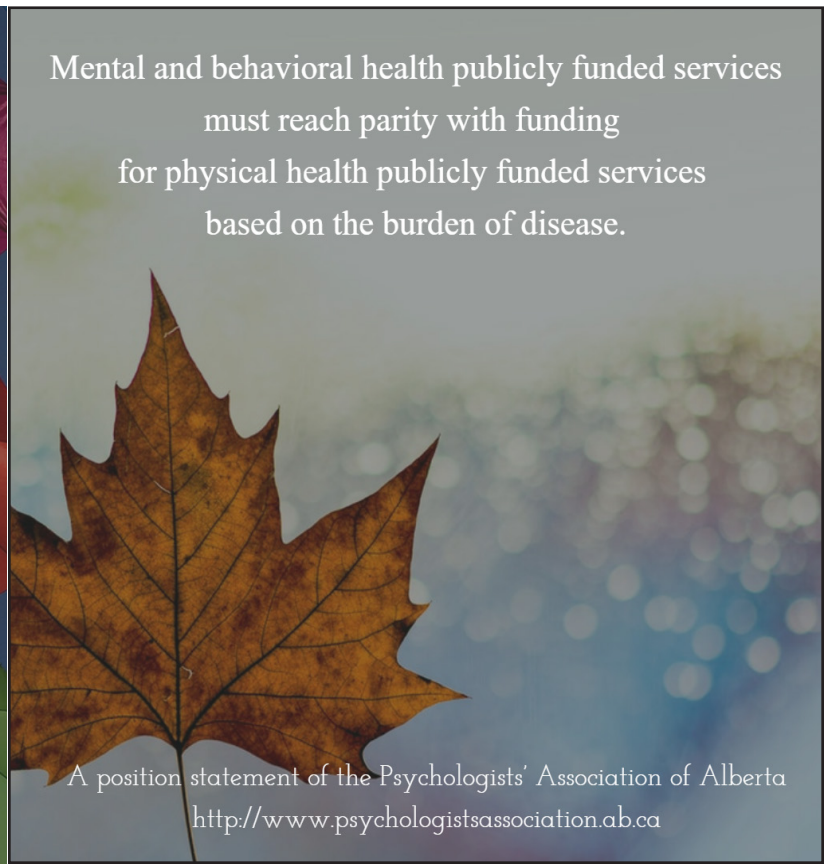
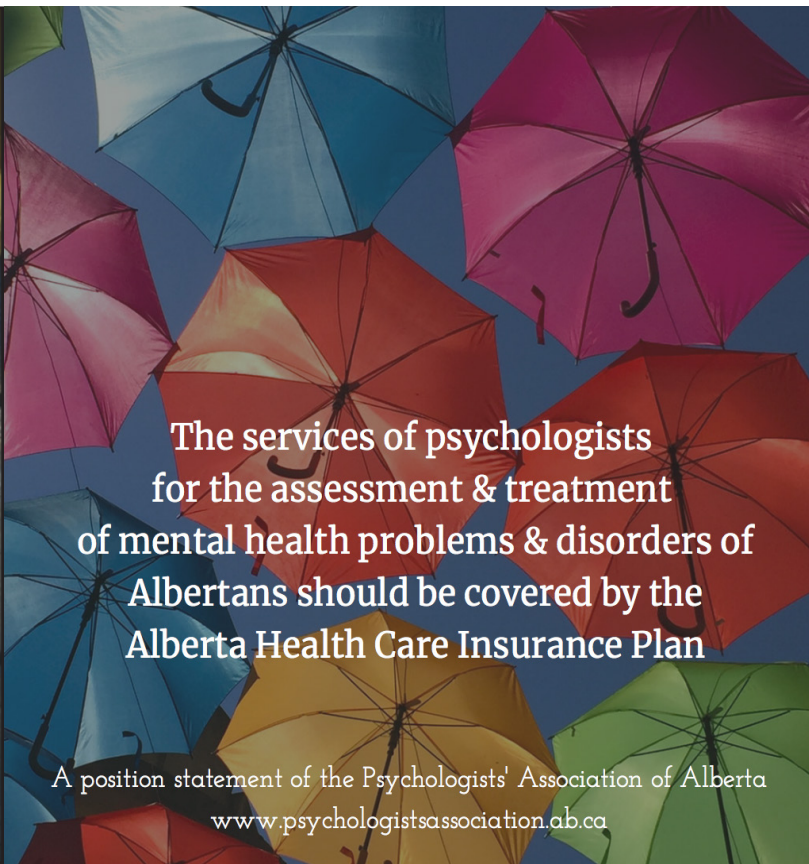
This puts a burden on the public health system & requires a general practitioner to make a mental health determination he or she may not have the time or skills to assess. Psychologists are autonomously regulated health practitioners, accept self-referrals, & function fully independently of medical oversight.



- Make session & plan caps meaningful

Effective psychological treatment is often 15 to 20 sessions. A cap that would afford a meaningful amount of service would cost approximately \$4 000, based on \$200 per session.

In Alberta, there are enough psychologists – the issue is not availability.
It is inability to access due to unnecessary financial barriers.



Psychology Helps

Dealing with Difficult Constituents¹

Introduction

Constituents contact their elected officials for many reasons. When constituents feel they have been treated unfairly they look to you for understanding and to address their concerns. Other times a constituent just wants to meet you because you are their elected official. In these situations, constituents usually know what they want, and the communication will be uncomplicated.

On some occasions, however, constituents may be distressed and will create a difficult situation for you or your staff. How you respond to an individual constituent will depend upon the nature and level of their distress. For example, a constituent suffering low levels of distress is likely to benefit from a timely and caring response from you.

To assist you with these situations The Psychologists' Association of Alberta (PAA) is providing you with this guide that will assist you and your staff to effectively communicate with distressed constituents. Included in this guide are general guidelines for interacting with distressed constituents and suggestions for an appropriate response to six types of distressed constituents.

We sincerely hope both you and your staff find this a useful resource for many years to come.

Suggestions for Enhancing Communication with Constituents

Legislators and legislative staff want to assist constituents, but constituents may have difficulties communicating their needs. They may sometimes lack self-confidence in approaching an elected official or may feel inadequate in expressing their concerns. An appointment with you may be stressful, especially for the less experienced visitor to your office.

The purpose of this section is to highlight a few communication skills that may be helpful in your interactions with constituents. Inherent in these suggestions is conveying understanding and interest which, in turn, will reduce conflict with the constituent and neutralize stress in the office and for the constituent.

1. Short Beginning Phrases:

Use these words to lead the constituent into discussion: “So, what can I do for you today?” “Tell me more about that.”

2. Open-Ended Questions:

Begin with what, how and why. This leads to longer more specific responses such as: “What is on your mind?” “How may I help you?” “Why have you come today?” Who, when, and where typically elicit very brief responses.

3. Short Phrases:

These help to keep discussion going. “I see.” “I understand.” “Tell me more.” “This is interesting.”

4. Paraphrasing:

Rephrasing the content in your own words conveys to the constituent that you are listening to get the message right and encouraging further elaboration. You can paraphrase by using lead-ins such as the following: “Let me understand... ” “Basically what is happening is...”

5. Clarifying Facts:

Often this goes along with paraphrasing to help you get more of the picture and to focus a vague presentation. One of the best ways to clarify a fact is to say “Those are the facts as I see them. Don’t you agree?” Asking questions beginning with “Are you saying that...” or “Do you mean that...” followed by a rephrasing of the message helps to check the accuracy of what you heard your visitor say.

6. Feeling Description:

Rephrasing the emotional part of the message, responds to the constituent’s feelings to convey understanding: “From what you say, it sounds like you are frustrated (angry, upset, etc.).”

7. The Physical Setting:

Where the interaction occurs may contribute to or interfere with communication. Actively moving away from distractions can convey your interest in your constituent. Likewise, getting objects, such as desks or tables out from between you reduces barriers to communication. Sitting behind your desk communicates the power of a legislator’s authority. If threats have been implied, position yourself near an escape and do not isolate yourself for the meeting.

General Guidelines for Interaction with Distressed Constituents

- Whenever possible, offer to speak directly with the constituent, inviting the individual to come to your office if that is feasible. Your receptivity can have a positive effect on your interaction.
- Listen carefully to what troubles the constituent and try to see the issue from their point of view without necessarily agreeing or disagreeing. Paraphrasing, clarifying and rephrasing the emotional part of the message are especially helpful in conveying understanding.
- Acknowledge that you are sincerely concerned about your constituent's welfare. Let your constituent know that you care about how he or she feels.
- Offer to assist your constituent in reasonable ways; however, involve yourself only as far as you can. At times, in an attempt to reach or help a troubled constituent, you may become more involved than time or skill permits. Extending oneself to others always involves some risk, but it can be a gratifying experience when kept within realistic limits.
- Strange or inappropriate behavior should not be ignored. The constituent can be told that such behavior is inappropriate and that you cannot assist the individual when one acts in an inappropriate manner.

The Anxious Person

Danger is a key theme in the thoughts of an anxious person. Unknown and unfamiliar situations raise the anxiety level of these people. Often, the need to do things perfectly or to please everyone, create feelings of anxiety. They often have difficulties making decisions. They may be very concerned about speaking with you, fearing that they will make mistakes, or you will not be accepting of them.

Do...

- Let them discuss their feelings and thoughts. Often this alone relieves a great deal of pressure.
- Reassure when appropriate.
- Remain calm.
- Be clear and explicit.

Don't...

- Make the situation more complicated.
- Overwhelm with information and ideas.
- Use rapid-fire questioning.
- Get trapped into making decisions for them.

The Verbally Aggressive Person

People usually become verbally abusive in frustrating situations that they see as being beyond their control. The constituent's anger and frustration may become redirected to you. Typically, the anger is not directed at you personally.

Do...

- Acknowledge their anger and frustration. "I hear how angry you are."
- Rephrase what they are saying and identify their emotion. "I can see how upset you are because you feel your rights are being violated and nobody will listen."
- Allow them to ventilate, get the feelings out and tell you what is upsetting them.
- Reduce stimulation; invite the person to your office or other quiet place if this is comfortable (if this does not compromise your safety).
- Tell them that you are not willing to tolerate verbal abuse. "When you yell and scream at me that way, I find it hard (impossible) to listen."
- Ask the person to please move back if they are getting physically too close. "Please stand back; you are too close."
- Help the person problem-solve and deal with the real issues when the constituent becomes calmer and receptive.

Don't...

- Get into an argument or shouting match.
- Become hostile or punitive yourself. "You can not talk to me that way!"
- Press for explanations or reasons for their behavior. "I'd like you to tell me exactly why you are so disrespectful."
- Look away and not deal with the situation.
- Send a message that you are willing to accept abuse or threats.

The Violent or Physically Destructive Person

Violence, because of emotional distress, is becoming an increasing concern in the work environment. Typically, violence occurs only when the person is completely frustrated and feels unable to do anything about the situation. The adage, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure” best applies here.

Do...

- Prevent total frustration and helplessness by quickly and calmly acknowledging the intensity of the situation. “I can see you are really upset and really mean business and have some critical concerns on your mind.”
- Explain clearly and directly what behaviors are acceptable. “You certainly have the right to be angry, but threatening me, yelling, hitting or breaking things is not okay.”
- Stay in an open area where there are other people.
- Get necessary help (other staff, police, etc.).

Don't...

- Ignore warning signs that the person is about to explode, indicated by yelling, screaming, clenched fists or statements like, “You’re leaving me no choice.”
- Threaten, dare, taunt or push the person into a corner.



Uniqueness of Psychology

Psychologists are regulated health professionals who provide services including psychotherapy, assessment, diagnosis, and research of psychological health and problems. They are trained in evidence-based practices and follow a code of ethics that promotes respect for dignity and fair treatment.

**FOR MORE INFO, PLEASE VISIT
WWW.PSYCHOLOGISTSASSOCIATION.AB.CA**

The Person in Poor Contact with Reality

These people have difficulty distinguishing their fantasies or perceptions from reality. Their thinking is typically illogical, confused, disturbed. They may coin new words, see or hear things which no one else can, have irrational beliefs and exhibit bizarre or inappropriate behavior. Generally, these people are not dangerous and are very scared, frightened and overwhelmed.

Do...

- Respond with warmth and kindness, but with firm reasoning.
- Remove extra stimulation of the environment and see them in a quiet atmosphere (if you are comfortable doing so).
- Acknowledge your concerns and state that you would like to help them. “It seems very hard for you to deal with all these things that are happening, and I am concerned about you. I’d like to help.”
- Acknowledge the feelings or fears without supporting the misconceptions. “I understand you think they are trying to hurt you and I know how real it seems to you, but I don’t hear the voices (see the devil, etc.).”
- Reveal your difficulty in understanding them, when appropriate. “I’m sorry but I don’t understand. Could you repeat that or say it in a different way?”
- Focus on the “here and now.” Switch topics and divert the focus from the irrational to the rational or the real.
- Speak to their healthy side, which they have. It’s okay to joke, laugh or smile, when appropriate.

Don’t...

- Argue or try to convince them of the irrationality of their thinking, as that makes them defend their position (false perceptions) more.
- Play along. “Oh yeah, I hear the voices (or see the devil).”
- Encourage further revelations of craziness.
- Demand, command or order.
- Expect customary emotional responses.

The Suspicious Person

Typically, these people are tense, anxious, mistrustful loners who have few friends. They tend to interpret minor oversights as significant personal rejection and often overreact to insignificant occurrences. They see themselves as the focal point of everybody's behavior and everything that happens has special meaning to them. They are overly concerned with fairness and being treated equally. Feelings of worthlessness and inadequacy underlie most of their behavior.

Do...

- Express compassion, without inappropriate closeness; remember suspicious people have trouble with closeness and warmth.
- Be firm, steady, punctual and consistent. Stay in an open area where there are other people.
- Be specific and clear in your communication.

Don't...

- Assure the person that you are their friend; agree that you are a stranger, but even strangers can be concerned.
- Be overly warm, nurturing or flattering.
- Challenge or agree with any mistaken or illogical beliefs.
- Be cute, humorous or ambiguous.

The Demanding Person

Typically, the amount of time and energy given to these people is never enough. They may seek to control your time and to be very persistent in seeking your attention. They may consider your time and attention as a reflection of their worth.

Do...

- Assert your own scheduling needs. "Excuse me, I need to attend other things."
- Use "broken record" technique, repeating same message. "I wish there were more I could do, but there is not."
- Ignore persistent demands after other strategies have been tried.

Don't...

- Allow this constituent to disrupt your plans, e.g. canceling out of attending a meeting.
- Chastise or lecture or in other ways give more time.

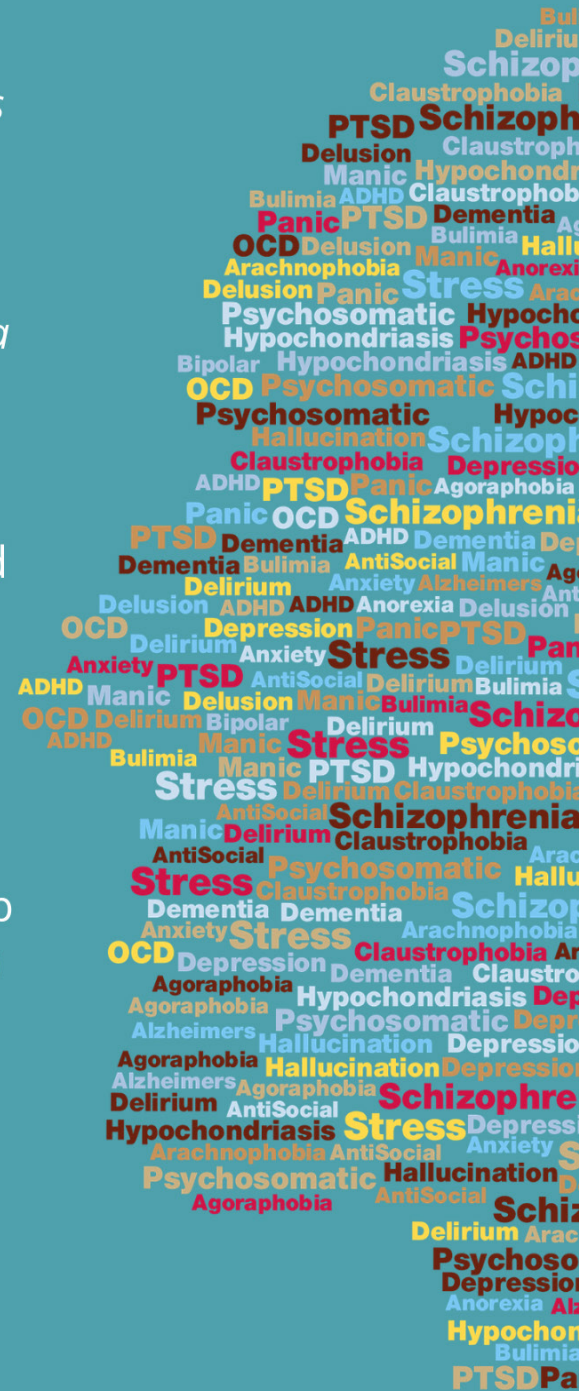
Uniqueness of Psychology

The uniqueness of psychology is reflected in the definition of a psychologist:

Psychologists are regulated health professionals who provide services including psychotherapy, assessment, diagnosis, and research of psychological health and problems. They are trained in evidence-based practices and follow a code of ethics that promotes respect for dignity and fair treatment.

It is the extent of their focused education and training in cognition, emotions and behaviour, and how to affect behavioural changes, that makes psychologists unique.

Psychologists spend 9 to 11 years of university education and residency/internship (7 or more for masters-trained psychologists) exploring and developing the science and evidence-based practice of psychology. They are trained as the experts, not only in psychological diagnosis, assessment and psychotherapeutic modalities, but also in the foundations and underpinnings of human behaviour including development, learning theory, neurophysiology, personality and motivation.



About Us

PAA is the voice of, & for, psychology in Alberta. Our mission is to advance the science-based profession of psychology & to promote the well-being & potential of all Albertans.

Originally a joint organization with the profession's regulatory body since 1958, in 1996 the Psychologists' Association of Alberta (PAA) officially incorporated as a separate non-profit professional association. Alberta has 3 500 psychologists, a robust psychologist-per-capita distribution to meet Alberta's needs.

PAA is available to you and your staff for information and consultation about handling difficult situations with constituents or others. Consultation with a psychologist member of PAA is confidential.

Psychologist members of PAA are licensed to practice in the province of Alberta and have advanced degrees (either masters or doctorate). Obtaining this training requires 6-13 years of university study and over 1 600 hours of supervised practice in psychology along with written and oral proficiency exams. No mental health profession has more education and training in psychology than do psychologists, who are licensed to provide services for mental and emotional disorders.

PAA member psychologists adhere to the highest standards of ethics and practice as required by the Canadian Psychological Association's ethical guidelines and the College of Alberta Psychologists' Practice Standards.

We collaborate with partners and allies across the province, in Canada, & across North America to advance psychological health & wellness. Just a few of those include:

American Psychological Association

Canadian Council of Professional Associations of Psychology

Canadian Psychological Association

Health Groups:

- The Alberta Health “Valuing Mental Health” Committee Collaborative Practice
- The Alberta Pain Network & Opioid Crisis Task Force
- CASA / UAlberta Research Chair in Child & Adolescent Mental Health Launch
- Collaboration with the other Health Professions Act Associations
- AHS Addiction & Mental Health Strategic Clinical Network

Provincial Advocacy Groups:

- The Alberta Alliance for Mental Illness and Mental Health
- The Palix Foundation
- The Autism Alberta provincial review
- CMHA Alberta
- Reforming the Family Justice System
- Alberta Workplace Wellness Network



Targeted Response Groups:

- The Canadian Red Cross specific to the Wood Buffalo 2016 Wildfire recovery
- Public Action Plan Ministerial Panel on Child Intervention recommendations
- Concordia University of Edmonton's PsyD Advisory Committee
- University Blue Quills Indigenous Psychology Undergrads



Learn More

Psychologists' Association of Alberta <http://www.psychologistsassociation.ab.ca/>

Ekos 2011 Survey of Canadian attitudes toward psychologists & accessing psychological services. [www.cpa.ca/docs/file/poll/NationalFindings\(English\).pdf](http://www.cpa.ca/docs/file/poll/NationalFindings(English).pdf)

2012 Canadian Community Health Survey by Statistics Canada <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/130617/dq130617b-eng.htm>

2015 Mental Health Care System Mood Disorders Survey <https://mdsc.ca/research/2015-mental-health-care-system-survey-results/>

Peachey's 2017 Provincial Clinical and Preventative Services Planning for Manitoba <https://www.gov.mb.ca/health/pcpsp.html>

Cam Wilde's 2014 gap analysis of Alberta's public mental health & addictions services <https://alberta.cmha.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/GAP-MAP-Report-2014.pdf>

College of Alberta Psychologists <http://www.cap.ab.ca/>

Alberta Health Professions Act <http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/acts/h07.pdf>

AB HPA Psychologists Profession Regulation http://www.qp.alberta.ca/documents/Regs/2005_251.pdf