

## **How to get your MFT License in Tennessee (An unofficial guide)**

### **First: Who needs a Tennessee License?**

Anyone who is practicing as a Marriage and Family Therapist in the State of Tennessee must have a Tennessee License.

*The state licensing act (TCA/63-22-123 et seq) and subsequent administrative rulings (Chapter 0450-2) make it unlawful for anyone who is not licensed to:*

*1. represent her/him self to the public as being licensed or*

*2. Engage in the practice of marital and family therapy without being credentialed or expressly exempted by the law*

**Exemptions:** *a. you are practicing under another licensing act that is specifically identified in the law*

*b. you are a priest, rabbi or minister performing counseling as a part of pastoral or professional duties*

*c. you are preparing for the practice of MFT under a qualified supervisor (defined in the law) and you are identified in way that clearly indicates a training status*

### **What if I just provide therapy without a license?**

This is similar to a physician operating without a license and the state may take action against you for being in violation of the law. Also, your liability insurance company may not stand by you if you are challenged by a client or in a state administrative or court action since you are not in compliance with the law.

Before you go any further, download the State licensing requirements and the application process from the State Health Department, Professional Boards web site. This is your primary source for information about the process. The guidelines published here are just restatments of these official guidelines.

[health.state.tn/boards/PC\\_MFT&CPT/legislation](http://health.state.tn/boards/PC_MFT&CPT/legislation)

[health.state.tn/boards/PC\\_MFT&CPT/application](http://health.state.tn/boards/PC_MFT&CPT/application)

## Steps to getting your license

1. Get your degree
2. Locate a work site and a supervisor
3. Apply for a temporary license
4. Conduct a background check
5. Apply for the National MFT license Examination/pass it
6. Complete your client hours and supervision hours
7. Pass the state jurisprudence examination/get permission to work independently
8. Obtain your license

1. Get your degree in marriage and family therapy or a related field from an institution accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools or by a comparable body. Course requirements include:

- Human development and personality (3 courses)
- Marriage and family studies (3 courses)
- Marriage and family therapy (3 courses)
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- Marriage and family therapy (3 courses)
- Research (1 course)
- Professional ethics (1 course)
- Assessment and diagnosis of cognitive, affective and behavioral problems and dysfunction in the DSM IV (1 course)
- A supervised internship/practicum of no less than (300) hours which includes experience in diagnosis using the DSM

Transcripts of your course work must be sent independently by the school registrar directly to the licensing board.

*Hint: Wait until you have graduated or you will have to do it again!*

2. Locate a work site and a supervisor

Find an AAMFT-approved supervisor or a "supervisor in training" (now called a supervisor candidate by AAMFT) to supervise your work, either within an agency that hires you, or in the AAMFT community. The supervisor must be approved by AAMFT, or be under the mentorship of an approved AAMFT supervisor. Other supervision will not count toward your license. Sometimes, agencies will provide AAMFT-approved supervision within the agency or by contract. Ask an agency

that is hiring you if they have AAMFT supervision in house, or if they will cover the cost of supervision outside the agency. Supervision required: 200 hours of supervision while you complete 1000 hours of direct client hours (1 to 5 ratio)

- A client hour is at least 50 minutes spent with an individual, couple, family or group in the conduct of the profession
- Supervision/client hours are concurrent.
- You can have more than one supervisor at once
- You will contract with your supervisor for fees, schedules, reporting requirements, insurance, etc.
- Supervisors charge from \$50-\$100 an hour for individual supervision and \$20-100 an hour for group supervision
- At least half (100 hours) must be individual supervision
- You can share supervision hours with one other person and still get credit for individual hours

A "supervisor-in-training" is an experienced MFT who is being mentored by an Approved Supervisor. She/he can supervise you as well, and usually charges less. Approved supervisors can tell you who they are mentoring; be sure that the State Board administrator knows that your supervisor is a "supervisor-in-training."

### 3. Apply for a temporary License

- At this stage, you fill your an application *as if you are applying for the final license (including the odd information form at the end of the application packet)* . You will also apply for a **Temporary License** at the same time. Your final license will be granted contingent on your successful completion of your supervised practice over a period of no less than 2 years. In the meantime, you will practice under supervision for a period not more than 3 years to complete this contingency. (*Note: the state board is issuing a change to the guidelines which give you 4 years to complete the process.*)
- The temporary license does not mean that you can operate independently or call yourself a therapist; you must still identify yourself as being under supervision and not fully licensed. You must make it clear that you are in a "training" status. Insurance companies and other entities will not recognize you as a fully credentialed therapist. You can use your educational degree, but not words like therapist or counselor (since they are licensed in TN also). If you are working for an agency, you can use the agency's titles, since the agency is the primary licensed entity. Consult your supervisor if you have

other credentials or if you do not know how to indicate your status in your client materials and business cards.

- Download the application forms from the State Health Department site: Fill out the complete application and the Mandatory Practitioner Profile Questionnaire for Licensed Health Care Providers ( even though you leave most of it blank). (<http://health.state.n.us/downloads/g6019027>). Take our word for it, if this is not filled out, your application will come back.
- Have your supervisor(s) fill out the temporary license application page and sign it in front of a notary public. This registers you with specific supervisors and keeps your application on track at the State Board. If you are under the supervision of an AAMFT "supervisor in training", be sure to have that person send a letter to the state board indicating that they have this designation.
- Request an official transcript from your graduate school registrar to be sent directly to the State Board (see address above)
- Sign your application as indicated with a Notary Public witness
- Include fees for the entire application (you will not have to pay this again at the end of the process when your application is complete) and for the temporary license.
- Include a certified copy of your birth certificate (usually you have to get this from the state or county where you were born)
- Include a recent (passport type) photo
- Include two letters from licensed mental health professionals, on their letterhead stationery. These letters attest to your moral character and ethics

4. Obtain a **criminal background check** for licensed health care workers in Tennessee. Go to the Department of Health website for instructions

5. **National MFT Exam:** When your application is complete and meets all the requirements:

- You will be notified that you have been granted a temporary license (this will be your license number if you complete the process)
- You will be given permission to take the national MFT examination. Instructions for registering for the exam and the exam periods will be included. The exam windows are specific 6 week time periods in Jan-Feb, May-June and Sept-Oct during which you can take the exam.
- Register with the testing company (PSI) as instructed and they will send you a "ticket" to sit for the exam. The examination sites are listed and you must reserve (and pay for) an appointment to take the exam. Most try to get a time

towards the end of the 6 week window, since the results do not come to you for six weeks after the window closes.

- Study. The exam is broad in scope and deep in its questioning. For example, you may get a question about confidentiality of a child in family you are seeing, and the question requires a choice about exactly how you respond to the school teacher or counselor. Some aspects of the exam cover areas you may not have studied in detail in your academic work, so consult the AAMFT lists of competency areas to get an idea of the breadth of the exam.
- Study materials and helps are available on line (google MFT exam).
- If you do not pass, you can take the exam again. If you ask, PSI will send you a breakdown of your state and national results and your scores for each of the areas of the exam

## **6. Complete your clinical hours and supervision hours**

- Consult the regulations to keep yourself within the mft scope of practice. Generally, we can not use tests to determine a clinical diagnosis (such as a psychologist or psychological examiner might) and we can not prescribe medicines. We can diagnose mental illnesses according to the DSM, and we are listed by the state occupational standards as mental health professionals.
- Keep careful logs of your clinical hours and your supervision hours. Try to keep them in a running 5 to 1 ratio.
- Reregister supervisors with the state board if they change
- When you complete your hours, fill out the verification of hours page of the original application and have your supervisor sign it in front of a Notary Public. Submit this to the Board for consideration of your complete application.
- Continue with your supervisor (though the frequency may decrease) until the final granting of the license.

**7. Final written examination.** When you receive notification of the acceptance of your application, you will get instructions to take the State jurisprudence test. This focuses on state-specific ethics and laws (such as child protection laws) in the state.

- Since the state law includes the AAMFT ethical standards as the state standard for MFTs, the ethics portion may include questions based on these standards.
- There is usually a case study.

- Some questions may relate to Tennessee specific laws, such as the age of majority for health care and client confidentiality/privilege.
- This test is scored immediately, and you can receive a letter giving you permission to work as a licensed mft.

8. **License.** Once your license is ratified by the Board, you will receive your license to hang on your wall!!! You are finished!!!