

# Rehabilitation Counselor

## Snapshot

**Career Cluster(s):** Human Services

**Interests:** Counseling, mental health, physical rehabilitation, disability management, sociology, psychology

**Earnings (2018 Median):** \$35,630 yearly; \$17.13 hourly

**Employment & Outlook through 2026:** Faster than average growth expected

## OVERVIEW

### Sphere of Work

Rehabilitation counselors (also called case managers, rehabilitation specialists, and human services counselors) provide vocational, medical, housing, employment, and personal support services to individuals and groups with disabilities. In general, they work to help their clients become more independent, employable, and productive. Rehabilitation counselors support clients living with disabilities present since birth or impairments resulting from illness, disease, addiction, accident, or injury. For instance, individuals experiencing employment, housing, or social complications



and challenges related to HIV/AIDS, schizophrenia, or intellectual disability are generally eligible for rehabilitation counseling under the Rehabilitation Act and the Americans with Disabilities Act. The range of counseling services provided by rehabilitation counselors includes coordinating counseling activities at residential facilities, overseeing job training and vocational counseling programs, and creating rehabilitation plans for clients.

### Work Environment

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Rehabilitation counselors spend their workdays seeing clients in a wide variety of settings, including public or private rehabilitation facilities, mental health facilities, schools and universities, insurance companies, job training and placement programs, prisons and hospitals, and private counseling practices. Rehabilitation counselors may have an office or may travel to see clients. Given the diverse demands of rehabilitative counseling, rehabilitation counselors may need to work days, evenings, weekends, and on-call hours to meet client or caseload needs.

### Profile

**Interests:** Data, People  
**Working Conditions:** Work Inside  
**Physical Strength:** Light Work  
**Education Needs:** Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree  
**Licensure/Certification:** Required  
**Physical Abilities Not Required:** Not Climb, Not Kneel  
**Opportunities for Experience:** Military Service, Volunteer Work, Part Time Work  
**Holland Interest Score\*:** SEC

\* See Appendix A

with a wide range of people, including those considered at-risk and those from diverse cultural, social, and educational backgrounds.

### Occupation Interest

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Individuals drawn to the rehabilitation counseling profession tend to be intelligent and socially conscious and able to quickly assess situations, find resources, demonstrate caring, and solve problems. Successful rehabilitation counselors display traits such as time management, knowledge of human behavior, initiative, and concern for individuals and society. Rehabilitation counselors should find satisfaction in spending time

### A Day in the Life—Duties and Responsibilities

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Rehabilitation counselors help people with physical, mental, developmental, or emotional disabilities live independently. They

work with clients to overcome or manage the personal, social, or psychological effects of disabilities on employment or independent living. A rehabilitation counselor's daily duties and responsibilities are determined by the individual's area of job specialization and work environment. Rehabilitation counseling specialties include physical rehabilitation, mental health counseling, substance abuse counseling, disability management, corrections, vocational assessment, forensic rehabilitation, pediatric rehabilitation, and geriatric rehabilitation.

Rehabilitation counselors work closely with clients to assess their situations and provide assistance. The rehabilitation counselor's first task is assessment. The rehabilitation counselor may complete client intake interviews for residential rehabilitation or medical facilities. He or she may also undertake client evaluations to assess physical, mental, academic, and vocational aptitude and readiness. The rehabilitation counselor then works with clients to develop counseling goals and objectives, oversees client job search efforts, and assists clients with employment, welfare, childcare, and food stamp applications. Depending on client needs, a rehabilitation counselor may also help clients obtain assistive devices, such as wheelchairs, that enable independence and employment, organize on-site job training for clients, help clients arrange transportation and housing, or lead workshops for clients in residential facilities.

Rehabilitation counselors act as liaisons for their clients. They participate in client team meetings and provide client updates to supervisors and client families. Rehabilitation counselors also develop connections and familiarity with community social service agencies, and refer clients to community services or agencies as needed.

All rehabilitation counselors ensure that rehabilitation programs meet the requirements of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). In addition, all rehabilitation counselors are responsible for completing client records and required documentation, such as referral forms and insurance forms, on a daily basis.

### ***Duties and Responsibilities***

- **Provide individual and group counseling to help clients adjust to their disability**
- **Evaluate clients' abilities, interests, experiences, skills, health, and education**
- **Develop a treatment plan for clients, in consultation with other professionals, such as doctors, therapists, and psychologists**
- **Arrange for clients to obtain services, such as medical care or career training**
- **Help employers understand the needs and abilities of people with disabilities, as well as laws and resources that affect people with disabilities**
- **Help clients develop their strengths and adjust to their limitations**
- **Locate resources, such as wheelchairs or computer programs, that help clients live and work more independently**
- **Maintain client records and monitor clients' progress, adjusting the rehabilitation or treatment plan as necessary**
- **Advocate for the rights of people with disabilities to live in a community and work in the job of their choice**

## ***WORK ENVIRONMENT***

### **Physical Environment**

The immediate physical environment of rehabilitation counselors vary based on their caseload and specialization. Rehabilitation counselors spend their workdays seeing clients in a wide variety of settings, including public or private rehabilitation facilities, mental health facilities, schools and universities, insurance companies, job

training and placement programs, prisons and hospitals, and private counseling practices.

### ***Relevant Skills and Abilities***

#### **Interpersonal/Social Skills**

- Being able to work independently
- Being patient
- Having good judgment
- Motivating others
- Providing support to others

#### **Organization & Management Skills**

- Demonstrating leadership
- Making decisions
- Managing time
- Meeting goals and deadlines

#### **Research & Planning Skills**

- Predicting

to access client records. Rehabilitation counselors should also be comfortable traveling for work, as they may be required to frequently visit client homes and facilities.

### **Human Environment**

Rehabilitation counselors interact with many people. They should be comfortable meeting with colleagues, staff, client families, incarcerated people, and people living with mental, physical, and emotional disabilities.

### **Technological Environment**

Rehabilitation counselors use computers and a range of telecommunication tools to perform their job. They must be comfortable using computers

## ***EDUCATION, TRAINING, AND ADVANCEMENT***

### **High School/Secondary**

High school students interested in pursuing a career as a rehabilitation counselor should prepare themselves by developing good study habits. Coursework in foreign languages, public safety, sociology, psychology, and education can provide a strong foundation for college-level work in the rehabilitation counseling field. Due to the diversity of rehabilitation counseling specialties, high school students interested in this career path may benefit from seeking internships or part-time work that expose the students to diverse groups of people and social needs.

***Suggested High School Subjects***

- Applied Communication
- College Preparatory
- English
- Humanities
- Literature
- Psychology
- Social Studies
- Sociology

***Related Career Pathways/Majors*****Human Services Cluster**

- Counseling & Mental Health Services Pathway
- Family & Community Services Pathway

## Famous First

The New Latin word *autismus* (English translation autism) was coined by the Swiss psychiatrist Eugen Bleuler in 1910 as he was defining symptoms of schizophrenia. The word autism first took its modern sense in 1938 when Hans Asperger of the Vienna University Hospital adopted Bleuler's terminology autistic psychopaths in a lecture in German about child psychology. Asperger was investigating an ASD now known as Asperger syndrome, though for various reasons it was not widely recognized as a separate diagnosis until 1981. Leo Kanner of the Johns Hopkins Hospital first used autism in its modern sense in English when he introduced the label early infantile autism in a 1943 report of 11 children with striking behavioral similarities. Almost all the characteristics described in Kanner's first paper on the subject, notably "autistic aloneness" and "insistence on sameness," are still regarded as typical of the autistic spectrum of disorders. It is not known whether Kanner derived the term independently of Asperger.

Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugen\\_Bleuler](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eugen_Bleuler)



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## **College/Postsecondary**

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Most employers require a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling or a related field. Master's degree programs teach students to evaluate clients' needs, formulate, and implement job placement strategies, and understand the medical and psychological aspects of disabilities. These programs typically include a period of supervised clinical experience, such as an internship.

Although some employers hire workers with a bachelor's degree in rehabilitation and disability studies, these workers typically cannot offer the full range of services that a rehabilitation counselor with a master's degree can provide. Students in bachelor's degree programs learn about issues faced by people with disabilities and about the process of providing rehabilitation services. Some universities offer dual-degree programs in rehabilitation counseling, in which students can earn a bachelor's and master's degree in 5 years. Postsecondary students interested in becoming rehabilitation counselors should work towards an undergraduate degree in counseling or a related field, such as psychology or social work. Coursework in education, public safety, and foreign languages may also prove useful in their future work. Postsecondary students can gain work experience and potential advantage in their future job searches by securing internships or part-time employment in social service agencies or with individuals or groups living with physical, mental, or emotional disabilities.

Interested college students should also research and apply to master's degree programs for rehabilitation counseling. Master's degree programs in rehabilitative counseling typically include such courses as counseling theory, assessment, human development, ethics, evaluation, and case management; a practicum or internship is mandatory for degree completion.

### ***Related College Majors***

- Counselor Education/Student Counseling & Guidance Services
- Psychology, General
- Sociology

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## **Adult Job Seekers**

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Adults seeking employment as rehabilitation counselors should have obtained a master's degree in rehabilitation counseling or a

similar field, such as social work, psychology, or sociology, and earned national certification. Adult job seekers should educate themselves about the educational and professional license requirements of their home states and the organizations where they seek employment.

Adult job seekers may benefit from joining professional associations to help with networking and job searching. Professional rehabilitation counseling associations, such as the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC), generally offer career workshops and maintain lists and forums of available jobs.

### **Professional Certification and Licensure**

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Licensing requirements for rehabilitation counselors differ by state and by type of services provided. Rehabilitation counselors who provide counseling services to clients and patients must attain a counselor license through their state licensing board. Rehabilitation counselors who provide other services, however, may be exempt from state licensing requirements. For example, rehabilitation counselors who provide only vocational rehabilitation services or job placement assistance may not need a license.

Licensure typically requires a master's degree and 2,000 to 4,000 hours of supervised clinical experience. In addition, counselors must pass a state-recognized exam. To maintain their license, counselors must complete annual continuing education credits.

Applicants should contact their state licensing board for information on which services or counseling positions require licensure. Contact information for these state licensing boards can be found through the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification.

Some employers prefer or require rehabilitation counselors to be certified. The Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification offers the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) certification. Applicants must meet advanced education, work experience, and clinical supervision requirements and pass a test. Certification must be renewed every 5 years. Counselors must complete continuing education requirements or pass a reexamination to renew their certification.



### **Additional Requirements**

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Individuals who find satisfaction, success, and job security as rehabilitation counselors will be knowledgeable about the profession's requirements, responsibilities, and opportunities. Successful rehabilitation counselors engage in ongoing professional development. Rehabilitation counselors must have high levels of integrity and ethics as they interact with at-risk people and groups and have access to personal information. Membership in professional counseling associations is encouraged among all rehabilitation counselors as a means of building status in a professional community and networking.

## **Fast Fact**

**Boys are about four times more likely than girls to develop autism spectrum disorder, and the US leads the world with the highest autism rate followed by Japan, Canada, and the UK**

Source: mayo clinic and statistica.com

## ***EARNINGS AND ADVANCEMENT***

The median annual wage for rehabilitation counselors was \$35,630 in May 2018. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$22,990, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$63,820.

## Median annual wages May 2018

**Counselors, social workers, and other community and social service specialists:** \$44,960

**Total, all occupations:** \$38,640

**Rehabilitation counselors:** \$35,630

Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

In May 2018, the median annual wages for rehabilitation counselors in the top industries in which they worked were as follows:

State government, excluding education and hospitals	\$51,350
Individual and family services	\$33,300
Nursing and residential care facilities	\$31,640
Community and vocational rehabilitation services	\$31,260

Depending on where they work, some rehabilitation counselors may work evenings or weekends.

## ***EMPLOYMENT AND OUTLOOK***

Rehabilitation counselors held about 119,700 jobs in 2018. The largest employers of rehabilitation counselors were as follows:

Community and vocational rehabilitation services	30%
Individual and family services	18%
State government, excluding education and hospitals	13%
Nursing and residential care facilities	12%
Self-employed workers	8%

Employment of rehabilitation counselors is projected to grow 10 percent from 2018 to 2028, faster than the average for all occupations. Demand for rehabilitation counselors is expected to grow with the increase in the elderly population and with the continued rehabilitation needs of other groups, such as veterans and people with disabilities.

### **Percent change in employment, Projected 2018–28**

**Counselors, social workers, and other community and social service specialists:** 12%

**Rehabilitation counselors:** 10%

**Total, all occupations:** 5%

Note: All Occupations includes all occupations in the U.S. Economy.

Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Employment Projections program

Older adults are more likely than other age groups to become disabled or injured. Rehabilitation counselors will be needed to help the elderly learn to adapt to any new limitations and learn strategies to live independently.

In addition, there will be a continued need for rehabilitation counselors to work with veterans who were disabled during their military service. They will also be needed to work with other groups, such as people who have learning disabilities, autism spectrum disorders, or substance abuse problems.

Job prospects are expected to be good because of job growth and the need to replace workers.

Rehabilitation counselors work in a variety of settings, such as community rehabilitation centers, senior citizen centers, and youth guidance organizations.

***Related Occupations***

- Educational Counselor
- Employment Specialist
- Marriage Counselor
- Medical Social Worker
- Occupational Therapist
- Psychologist
- Social Worker
- Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor

## ***Conversation With . . . HEATHER DINEEN***

Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) Therapist  
Children Making Strides  
Pocasset, Massachusetts  
Applied Behavior Analysis Therapist, 9 years

### **1. What was your individual career path in terms of education/training, entry-level job, or other significant opportunity?**

I've always been interested in working with special needs children. I have dyslexia and received support from my teachers when I was in school. I wanted a job where, in turn, I'd be able to support children.

I majored in sociology at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst and completed a double minor in early childhood and special education with the idea of going on to get a master's in special education. But after college I got a job in my hometown with an organization that works with children on the autism spectrum disorder and became intrigued with the idea of becoming an applied behavioral analysis therapist. I worked in the office, getting my feet wet, learning more about the profession. All of my training was done on the job.

At my organization, Children Making Strides, we use applied behavior analysis to teach behaviors to children on the autism spectrum. We break behaviors into achievable goals, whether it is teaching children how to brush their teeth or calm themselves or teaching them how to recognize alphabet letters and read.

My clients range from age 2 to 7. I work with them in their homes as well as Children Making Strides centers in the nearby towns of Plymouth and Fall River.

I also train new applied behavior analysis therapists. I help them understand the concepts and supervise their work with clients.

### **2. What are the most important skills and/or qualities for someone in your profession?**

Strong communication skills are important. You need to be a people person. You sometimes work with children who are aggressive and nonverbal. The situation can be very stressful for families. You need to be able to connect with families and stay positive and peppy.

You also have to have excellent organizational skills. You are recording data at the same time you are giving children behavioral prompts. We keep binders of information on children, measuring their progress and their roadblocks.

And you need patience. This morning, it took my client 11 minutes to get dressed. You have to reinforce your client's behavior with prompts and cues and stay positive or they will feel defeated.

This isn't an office job. You get down on the floor and play with 2-year-olds.

### **3. What do you wish you had known going into this profession?**

I wish I knew how much opportunity there is in this profession and the paths to advancement. I thought if I stayed in this field, I'd be an applied behavior analysis therapist for the rest of my life. But I found out I could train to be a board certified behavior analyst, which is a supervisor position and comes with a significant increase in pay.

I'm now training to become Board Certified Behavior Analyst (BCBA), certified through an online program at Florida Tech.

### **4. Are there many job opportunities in your profession? In what specific areas?**

The number of children being diagnosed with an autism spectrum disorder is on the rise, which means there will be a corresponding increase in demand for applied behavior analysis services.

I see more companies specializing in ABA popping up and schools creating their own ABA programs to support families. As the profession grows, I see a need for increased levels of certification, more ladders for people to climb.

### **5. How do you see your profession changing in the next five years? How will technology impact that change, and what skills will be required?**

Our company will soon transition to digital data recording and graphing. Right now, our data is still handwritten in a binder. We graph our children's progress. I'm really looking forward to recording all of this data on a tablet. The information will be stored on a safe and secure site. It will make narrating reports, scheduling visits and billing a lot easier.

We've also started to use video modeling. You and I think washing our hands is really simple. There are actually a lot of steps involved. Watching a video of someone else doing it and imitating it often works better than me telling clients what to do.

**6. What do you enjoy most about your job? What do you enjoy least about your job?**

The best thing about my job is just making a difference every day. The reward is knowing you are helping someone become more successful and independent. You can't beat that. My job is one of those jobs where I cry happy tears more often than anything. Today I heard a child say, "Mom," for the first time. That's why I stay in the field.

Scheduling visits can be hard, especially if a client needs to reschedule. If one of my clients is sick and I can't get someone to fill that, I will lose out on that pay. Children Making Strides does a great job filling slots, but sometimes you have to drive longer than expected to get to a rescheduled appointment.

**7. Can you suggest a valuable "try this" for students considering a career in your profession?**

I urge anybody interested in going into the field to work and interact with people with developmental disabilities as much as possible. When I was in college, I babysat for several families who had children on the autism spectrum disorder. Internships are also great—my organization provides summer internships. Work with kids at a day camp, especially a day camp for kids with developmental disabilities.

## ***MORE INFORMATION***

### **American Case Management Association**

11707 W. 36th Street  
Little Rock, AR 72211  
501.907.2262  
[www.acmaweb.org](http://www.acmaweb.org)

### **American Counseling Association**

5999 Stevenson Avenue  
Alexandria, VA 22304  
800.347.6647  
[www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org)

### **Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired**

1703 N. Beauregard St., Suite 440  
Alexandria, VA 22311  
703.671.4500  
[markr@aerbvi.org](mailto:markr@aerbvi.org)  
[www.aerbvi.org](http://www.aerbvi.org)

### **Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification**

1699 E. Woodfield Road, Suite 300  
Schaumburg, IL 60173  
847.944.1325  
[info@crccertification.com](mailto:info@crccertification.com)  
[www.crccertification.com](http://www.crccertification.com)

### **National Board for Certified Counselors**

3 Terrace Way, Suite D  
Greensboro, NC 27403-3660  
336.547.0607  
[nbcc@nbcc.org](mailto:nbcc@nbcc.org)  
[www.nbcc.org](http://www.nbcc.org)

### **National Clearinghouse for Professions in Special Education**

2900 Crystal Drive, Suite 1000  
Arlington, VA 22202-3557  
888.232.7733  
[ncpse@cec.sped.org](mailto:ncpse@cec.sped.org)  
[www.special-ed-careers.org](http://www.special-ed-careers.org)

### **National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials Utah State University**

6524 Old Main Hill  
Logan, UT 84322-6524  
866.821.5355  
[ncrtm@usu.edu](mailto:ncrtm@usu.edu)  
[ncrtm.org/moodle](http://ncrtm.org/moodle)

### **National Organization for Human Services**

5341 Old Highway 5, Suite 206, #214  
Woodstock, GA 30188  
770.924.8899  
[www.nationalhumanservices.org](http://www.nationalhumanservices.org)  
NOHS Awards, Scholarships, and Grants: [www.nationalhumanservices.org/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=24&Itemid=111](http://www.nationalhumanservices.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=24&Itemid=111)