

Not All Therapists Are the Same

There are many good people working in mental health. But UK titles are not equal — some are protected by law, most are not. Here is what each one actually guarantees.

The one-line rule: a title only means something if the law says who can use it. Everything below can describe a valuable professional — the difference is what the title **guarantees**.

Clinical Psychologist — protected by law (HCPC)

Illegal to use without registration with the Health and Care Professions Council. Guarantees doctoral-level training, supervised practice, ongoing professional standards and a formal complaints process. “Practitioner Psychologist” is protected in the same way.

Psychiatrist — protected by law (GMC)

A medical doctor specialising in mental health, registered with the General Medical Council. Can diagnose and prescribe medication. A different, complementary role — psychiatrists and psychologists often work together.

Counsellor / Psychotherapist — not protected

Anyone may use these titles. Training varies enormously — from excellent to none at all. Many counsellors are highly skilled: look for voluntary accreditation with a recognised body such as BACP or UKCP as a genuine quality marker.

Therapist / Life coach — not protected

No required training, no register, no oversight of any kind. This does not make every coach unhelpful — but the title itself tells you nothing.

The habit that protects you: whoever you are considering, ask which register they are on — then verify their number yourself at hcpc-uk.org/check-the-register (or the relevant body). A genuine professional will welcome the question.

Ready to talk it through? Begin with a First Step Consultation — 90 minutes with Dr Millward, and a written formulation that explains what is going on and exactly what she recommends. → drclairemillward.com

Dr Claire Millward, Consultant Clinical Psychologist · HCPC registration PYL18637. This guide offers general information, not individual clinical advice. If you or someone else needs urgent help, contact your GP, call NHS 111, or in an emergency call 999. © Dr Claire Millward.