

Core Competencies in Forensic Psychology

Board certification assures the public and the profession that the specialist in forensic psychology has met specific education, training, and experience requirements, and has demonstrated, through work samples and written and oral examinations, the advanced competencies required by the specialty. Both the oral and written examinations encompass the following interrelated domains of professional competency; the oral examination is tailored to the candidate's practice areas. During the oral examination, the candidate's practice samples are discussed in detail, but the oral examination moves well beyond the samples to assess all relevant competencies.

Foundational Competencies

The knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values that serve as a foundation for the functions a forensic psychologist is expected to perform.

Interpersonal Interactions: Forensic specialists recognize and appreciate appropriate role boundaries with examinees, attorneys, and the courts. They make clear to the examinee that their allegiance is to providing accurate information to the fact finder, rather than an advocate for a particular side. Specialists are respectful of the legal system and those who serve it as well as the effect individual and cultural differences have on interpersonal interaction.

Individual and Cultural Diversity: Forensic specialists recognize individual and group differences, cultural-specific signs and symptoms, the impact and implications of diversity and culture within a psycholegal context, the potential effect of their own cultural worldview and biases on their professional work, and the importance of practicing with cultural competence.

Ethics and Legal Foundations: Forensic specialists integrate into their daily practice an advanced knowledge of ethical and professional codes, standards, and guidelines; the law and legal system; and applicable statutes, administrative code, and case law in their jurisdiction of practice.

Professional Identification: Forensic specialists display a professional obligation to obtain and maintain advanced knowledge and skills on the intersection of legal theory, procedures, and law with clinical and research issues, practice, and ethics. They recognize the distinction between forensic and traditional clinical roles. Specialists demonstrate a commitment to understanding the implications of how their opinions are used by the fact finders, and are ready to fully explain and document the basis for their opinions in a way that can be evaluated by decision makers.

Functional Competencies

The major functions that a forensic psychologist is expected to perform, each of which requires integration of the foundational competencies in problem identification and resolution.

Assessment: Forensic specialists collect data from multiple sources using multiple methods to assess response styles, functional legal capacities, and characteristics relevant to the specific psycholegal issue in impartial, reliable, valid, and culturally sensitive ways. They are well-versed in the current scientific literature regarding psychological tests used in their forensic assessments, and proficient in their proper administration, scoring, and interpretation. Specialists are prepared to clearly explain the rationale for test selection, relevance of the test used, and description of test results for the trier of fact. They communicate relevant information that addresses the psycholegal question, and provide sufficient explanation to logically support their opinion using understandable language tailored to the audience, supported by multiple sources, with appropriate limitations and alternative explanations explicitly acknowledged.

Intervention: Forensic specialists apply knowledge of mental health law, evidence-based practice, the forensic context, and its effect on traditional therapeutic relationships and goals.

Consultation: Forensic specialists demonstrate the ability to provide ethical expert consultative services by applying specialized knowledge, skills, experience, training, and education to matters that involve psychology and the law or legal system. They are aware of the various consultative roles in which forensic practitioners engage, and they recognize potential conflicts of interest and threats to objectivity that may result from the adoption of multiple roles.

Science Base and Application: Forensic specialists employ a sound theoretical foundation and knowledge of the scientific and professional literature to the practice of forensic psychology.

Supervision/Teaching/Management: Forensic specialists demonstrate relevant and current forensic knowledge and skills to provide high-quality supervision and mentoring to trainees and subordinates; to teach forensic psychology effectively; and to carry out administrative activities and/or program design, implementation, and evaluation. They integrate their understanding of ethical and professional standards and codes of conduct into their supervisory, instructional, and managerial roles.