

You may have noticed in reading articles by or about social workers that there are different sets of letters after their names...BSW, MSW, ACSW, LSW, LCSW, and others!

What is all this "alphabet soup" about?

There are various credentials that show that a social worker has met certain professional criteria. Here's what some of them mean.

Educational Credentials

A professional social worker has an accredited degree in social work.

BSW—Bachelor of Social Work, an undergraduate degree in social work

MSW—Master of Social Work, a graduate degree in social work

Licensing

States and other jurisdictions have laws that require or allow social workers to be licensed by the jurisdiction. Licensing laws vary from state to state, so the letters used to indicate that a social worker is licensed at a certain level will depend on the state/jurisdiction where the social worker lives or practices social work. Some examples are:

LSW—typically means Licensed Social Worker (although the requirements for LSW may differ from state to state)

LCSW—typically means Licensed Clinical Social Worker, or sometimes Licensed Certified Social Worker

CSW—typically means Certified Social Worker

Check with your state to find out the various social work licenses available. See the [ASWB](#) Web site for more info.

Professional Association Credentials

Some professional associations issue additional credentials to social workers who have met their criteria. One example is the *ACSW*, which stands for Academy of Certified Social Workers. The ACSW is a credential issued by the [National Association of Social Workers](#) to NASW members who have met education and experience requirements and pass the ACSW examination.