

"I am interested in helping individuals look back at their experiences and see what they need to address for their future well-being and to prevent further offending or harm to others."

Meet Geraldine to discover why she chose a career as a forensic psychologist.

Hon Professor Dr Geraldine Akerman

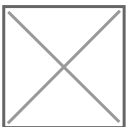
Consultant forensic psychologist

Employer or university

Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust

Salary range

Over £65K



How I got into the role

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I have always been interested in why individuals do what they do and the decisions they make. I was a counsellor and studied for a degree in Psychology and Counselling and then spent my career combining psychology and therapy.

I had always wanted to work in prisons and worked for the Prison Service for 22 years before joining the NHS, still working in prisons. I made this transition to work with those who are managing mental health difficulties.

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What I do

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People always think that forensic psychologists visit crime scenes or help the police to solve crimes, but very few do that. Most of our work would be in prisons, secure hospitals or in the community. We generally work with groups of people to help them learn more about themselves.

Every day is different, but I conduct risk assessments, undertake therapy, including using Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing (EDMR) and try to enable individuals to understand themselves so that they can make positive changes for the future.

EDMR really helps people who have experienced a traumatic event. Our brains can process and store memories incorrectly leading to memories being triggered by our senses. This can lead to people reacting as they did at the time of trauma. The brain feels as if the past disturbing event is happening now. EMDR therapy corrects this so that the painful memories associated with the trauma lose their emotional hold. The person can then remember the memory without feeling like they are reliving it.

I also take a compassion focussed and trauma-informed approach which are centred around a person's individual needs. Compassion-focused therapy (CFT) is a type of psychotherapy that helps people suffering from high levels of self-criticism and shame. It uses cognitive behavioural therapy ^[1] with concepts from evolutionary psychology, social psychology, developmental psychology, Buddhist psychology, and neuroscience. It can help people learn how to be kinder to themselves and others while feeling safe and capable in a world that can seem overwhelming. A trauma informed approach also looks at people's past experiences might be impacting on them now.

I am also the current chair of the Division of Forensic Psychology (DFP) and have really enjoyed working with the British Psychological Society (BPS) and DFP. I also co-founded a YouTube channel 'Let's Talk Forensic Psychology - YouTube ^[2]' on which we discuss all aspects of forensic psychology, which has been well received.

Life outside work

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I love reading, walking and spending time with my family, which is a great counterbalance for my more intense work. It's important to have interests outside of work and have that life/work balance.

Career plans and top tips for others

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I intend to continue to develop my skills as a Forensic Psychologist and practitioner, conducting research and presenting this to others. I am currently developing the forensic therapeutic provision in four prisons HMPS Grendon, Springhill, Bullingdon and Huntercombe.

You need to be interested in people, have some life experience, and have patience.

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Links

[1] https://www.healthcareers.nhs.uk/glossary#Cognitive_behavioural_therapy [2]
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