

Individual Counseling

What is counseling?

Counseling is a service that the university provides to you so that you can meet with a mental health professional to discuss personal problems that might be getting in the way of your academic success. Sometimes the goal of counseling is to explore possible ways to deal with a situation or problem. Sometimes counseling may give you added perspective into any underlying causes of the situations or problems. It is not unusual for things that happen in your life to be accompanied by strong emotions, both positive and negative. As a student, you may find yourself in situations where solutions don't look easily available. There are so many tasks that you have to accomplish while you're in college. You will need to establish healthy relationships with your peers, develop an identity independent from your family, manage the expected and unexpected disappointments of life, live through losses: these are realities that adults face at every age. Counseling may not be able to solve every problem or provide every answer, but it can offer you support and different resources as you live and cope with the discomfort of dealing with challenges.

How do I know if I need counseling?

You might need counseling if:

1. the problems and situations in your life exceed your ability to cope with them and
2. the resources you are aware of, and have access to, are not enough to help you re-establish balance without the help of a professionally trained counselor.

The events and feelings that bring you to counseling don't necessarily have to be a matter of life or death, although those kinds of situations are also appropriate for counseling. Sometimes counseling can help when you are experiencing certain life events for the first time. Let's say that this is the first time you have been away from home, or the first time you experienced a serious relationship breakup. A counselor may be able to offer you additional perspective, especially if your friends and family have little or no experience in similar situations. There are other times when the people that we usually rely on for emotional support are too close to the situation to stay objective. Meeting with a counselor to discuss your situation may actually help you decide if counseling would be useful.

What does it mean about me if I need counseling?

The most important thing to understand about counseling is that it does not mean you are "crazy". In fact, recognizing your needs and seeking help in meeting them is a sign of good sense and good self-care. When you have a physical injury that is not healing on its own, you seek help from a medical doctor, don't you? Why should your response to mental or emotional discomfort be any different? People who come to counseling usually have something in their lives that they would like to change, but they don't know

how. If this sounds like you, it means that you are aware of yourself and the world around you, you are curious about the things you don't know, and you are open to change. Thinking about changing can bring hope, but it can also be scary and difficult, so working with a counselor also demands courage in facing this fear. Recognizing these strengths in your self during the counseling process can contribute a lot to ensuring an overall positive counseling experience.

When will I meet with my counselor?

Counseling sessions last 45 minutes from the scheduled appointment time. At first, you might meet weekly, but that can change as your needs change. After a while, every other week may be all that you need, or even once a month. It is also possible that a different kind of counseling, such as group counseling or a stress clinic, might be more helpful to you at a certain point in your personal growth.. Discuss this with your counselor if you feel that your need for individual counseling is decreasing.

What happens in a typical counseling session?

Much of what happens in a typical counseling session is up to you. You will bring up the topics for discussion including what concerns you have and any thoughts or feelings you may have about these concerns. You might also talk about things you have done to try to resolve the problem or any new concerns that arise while you are in counseling. The counselor's job will be to listen to your concerns, help you clarify the nature of them, and help to generate possible strategies and solutions. Your counselor will not solve your problem; in fact, most of the time your counselor will refrain from giving advice. What your counselor will do, however, is give you helpful information about resources available on or off campus or information about the effectiveness of the strategies that you are thinking about using. In addition to talking those things through with you, your counselor may teach you specific skills such as relaxation and assertiveness, or help you learn to better recognize and identify feelings.

What should I talk about during my sessions?

During your sessions, you will be talking mostly about the concerns that brought you to counseling in the first place. While your counselor will certainly be interested in you as a whole person, this is not a social relationship and you won't be spending much of your time discussing the ins-and-outs of your daily life, except to the extent that they are involved in the problem you are trying to address. If talking about yourself is hard, let your counselor know this. It might be possible to find ways to make you more comfortable. Sometimes just acknowledging that is it hard can make it a little easier to talk. You'll probably find it easier and easier to talk as time goes on and you see that it is helping. It also may help as you get to know your counselor as a kind and caring person. It is not unusual for new concerns to arise during the counseling process. Talking about your life may make you more aware of problems and feelings of which you may have been unaware when you first decided to come for counseling. It is appropriate to bring these topics up with your counselor as you recognize them, even if they were not areas of

concern when you first came. Sometimes it can be hard to talk because you don't know what the consequences will be of sharing important personal information. It is important that you know that whatever you share with your counselor, except when someone's life or health is at risk, is confidential. That means that what you share with your counselor remains private unless you give written permission for it to be shared. This gives you freedom to discuss more things that are hard to disclose in outside the counseling office.

What can I do to make sure I get the most out of my sessions?

This is a question that you can discuss with your counselor since this may depend on the nature of your problems and challenges. For many students, it is helpful to become more aware of behavior, thoughts, and feelings between sessions both to help clarify the nature of your concerns and to observe what changes are occurring as a result of counseling. For others, thinking about and processing concerns between sessions may actually be counterproductive if it leads to excessive worry. Other things you may discuss with your counselor are books you may want to read that are related to your concern, keeping a journal, and practicing various skills, such as relaxation or assertiveness. If you negotiate to do such "homework" with your counselor, it will be important for you to follow through with these assignments or to talk about and work through the things that get in the way of doing them.

What if I need to talk to my counselor between sessions?

It is usually not possible for your counselor to talk to you on the telephone for a long period of time between sessions. It is also unlikely that your counselor will be immediately available by phone or in person. You are certainly always welcome to leave a message, but be aware that there may be some delay in receiving a reply. If you choose to leave a message, it will help if you tell the receptionist or secretary what times are best for the counselor to call you back. If you are in urgent need of counseling and your counselor is unavailable, the Counseling Center has a counselor on call Monday through Friday during regular business hours. It is especially important that you call if you are thinking about harming yourself or someone else. During the phone call, you and the on-call counselor can determine whether face-to-face contact is necessary. After hours and on weekends, the Link is available by telephone at (419) 352-1545.

What if I'm not comfortable with my counselor?

Just like anywhere else, sometimes it takes time to get comfortable with a new person, and sometimes two good people are just not a good match. Your counselor is aware that this can happen and will be open to discussing with you what is not working. Sometimes a shift in the emphasis of the sessions can be helpful, but there are times when a change in counselors is necessary. Please be assured that your counselor will gladly help you find another counselor here or elsewhere with whom you may be more compatible.

What if I need to miss an appointment?

Regular attendance is important for the counseling process to be the most effective. If it is absolutely necessary for you to miss an appointment, please call the Counseling Center as soon as possible. You don't need to speak directly with your counselor since the front desk personnel have access to your counselor's schedule. It may or may not be possible to reschedule for another appointment in the same week. If you often find it necessary to miss appointments, your counselor may help you explore whether your circumstances are such that counseling cannot be a priority for you. We understand that as students, your academic work takes up a lot of time. At times, counseling may have to be put on hold until you can make the time investment in the process necessary for it to be effective. Or you may decide that making a stronger commitment to counseling will actually help you to perform better and more effectively as a student.

How will I know when I'm ready to end counseling?

Counseling will end when you have reached the goals that brought you to counseling in the first place. It does not mean that you are going to be free from all problems and concerns, and that your life will go smoothly from this point on. But it may mean that with the assistance of counseling, you have developed ways of making peace with some things and accepting them as they are and you have developed strategies for changing things that are within your power to change. There are some times when you may decide that, although continued counseling may be helpful, it is not the necessity it once was and you can no longer justify the time commitment. Discuss those kinds of concerns with your counselor. The two of you can then look at the possible consequences of your decision so that you can make a more informed choice. Remember that ending counseling doesn't eliminate you from the possibility that you may need it again in the future. Knowing that counseling will continue to be available will be a comfort to you now that you have an additional resource to turn to when situations arise that are difficult for you to handle alone.