
College Student Mental Health

Why might counseling be suggested to a student?

People seek counseling for many reasons, ranging from a wish to solve a long-standing problem to a desire to enhance their own personal growth. To address the personal, educational, and career concerns of the students, the Counseling Center offers both group and individual counseling. Students come in to discuss issues, such as roommate conflicts, anxiety and stress management, depression, eating disorders, career choices, and family concerns including divorce and alcoholism. Students may also receive psychiatric services if medication is considered essential to the treatment of their concerns.

Here are some of the common instances when counseling might be recommended to a student:

Fundamental or traumatic changes in personal relationships, such as death of a family member or friend, divorce or separation in the family, etc.

Significant changes in mood or behavior, such as withdrawal from others, asocial activity (e.g., lying, stealing), spells of unexplained crying or outbursts of anger, or unusual agitation.

References to suicide -- since it is difficult to distinguish between serious threats and passing idle thoughts of suicide, judgment about the seriousness of a situation is best made in consultation with a psychologist or psychiatrist.

Anxiety and depression -- these are two of the more common symptoms that can significantly impair a student's functioning.

Psychosomatic symptoms -- concerns such as tension headaches, loss of appetite, excessive eating, insomnia, excessive sleeping, chronic stomach distress, etc.

Alcohol and drug abuse -- evidence of excessive drinking, drug abuse, or drug dependence is very often indicative of psychological problems.

Career choice concerns -- these concerns often reflect the student's struggle to understand him/herself and the world of work. Sometimes it reflects a problem with decision-making in general.

Concern about academics -- such as contemplating dropping out of school, worrying about possible academic failure, or considering a transfer to another school.

Some concerns may require counseling over the course of a semester or two, and some concerns may require counseling over an extended period of time. Extended counseling requires a referral to a therapist in the community. The student insurance policy offered through the Health Center on campus (410-704-2466) can

facilitate care while away from home (the family's insurance policy is worth looking into as an option, but insurance policies often vary with regard to mental health coverage and sometimes are not very portable).

What if your child already has a counselor, therapist, or psychiatrist at home?

If your daughter or son has already developed a relationship with a therapist at home, it can be difficult to consider making a change to a new therapist at school. Sometimes students will want to continue an established relationship with a therapist by arranging phone contacts from school. In some cases, this is the therapist's recommendation, and the arrangement can work well enough. However, we have found that some students do better when they are connected with a new therapist in Baltimore. While many students (and parents) are understandably tempted to look ahead optimistically and want to honor the student's growing independence, the transition to college is a time when direct therapeutic support is especially valuable. With few exceptions, face-to-face counseling is more effective than telephone counseling. We have repeatedly heard from students that--even when the move to a new therapist was made reluctantly--the new connection proved to be very helpful. We therefore recommend that families discuss with the student's therapist at home how this transition should best be handled. We encourage both therapists and families to consult with the Counseling Center about the best options available here, in Baltimore.

What about confidentiality?

Counseling often involves the disclosure of sensitive personal information. Any information a client shares with Center staff members is protected by professional ethics and state law. As such, information about the counseling a student receives is not released, except upon a student's written permission, in circumstances that would result in clear danger to the student or others, or as may be required by law.

It is understandable that you may wish to be involved when your son or daughter seeks counseling, but confidentiality (described above) does not permit such involvement without the consent of the student. Often, the best source of information for parents about the counseling process is the student. Beyond that, if more information is desired, the student must sign a written release specifically permitting us to communicate with you. While it is not legal or ethical for the Center to provide parents with information that a son or daughter reveals in counseling, parents are welcome to call the Center and provide us with feedback or share concerns about a child.