WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU SEE A COUNSELLOR

What is counselling?

Counselling is a process which offers you the opportunity to explore any issues which are causing you concern or distress. These matters can be emotional or social or they might be connected to your work or studies.

Sometimes the concern can be about an issue which has bothered you for some time; sometimes it can be the result of a recent event or crisis.

Concerns like these can

- result in uncomfortable feelings such as anxiety, depression, unhappiness or fear
- cause you stress, perhaps disrupting your normal eating or sleeping patterns
- prevent you from participating fully in life at University

How can counselling help?

Counselling can

- create time and space to explore things confidentially with a trained Counsellor who is not directly involved
- help find a new perspective on a problem
- provide an opportunity to think about options for the future

By using counselling you can give yourself the chance to recover your ability to cope. You might also rediscover strengths which can give you confidence to change aspects of your life.

What are counsellors?

The Counsellors who work at the Counselling Service come from a variety of backgrounds. They have all undertaken training for the work which

- helps them to use their skills of listening so that people can become more open about their concerns
- enables them to encourage people to pay attention to what they feel and think
- increases their understanding of what makes people tick, feel and behave in the way they do

Counsellors will not tell you what to do and they will not give advice. They are well aware that the best choices are the ones that people discover for themselves and they will help you to
focus on your options. The choice you make as a result of counselling will be put in place by you: it is a very active process.

Counsellors also understand the stresses and strains of being at University and the difficulties that can result from trying to juggle many aspects of life at once.

You will find that you are received warmly at the Counselling Service. Although Counsellors are friendly, they are neither friends nor surrogate parents nor partners. They will certainly respect you as a separate, independent individual.

**How does counselling work?**

The main ways in which, counselling helps are by listening and prompting. The listening helps to get a problem out in the open with someone you don’t meet in any other role. The prompting in the form of gentle questions or reflections can help you to focus on important areas of your life which can allow you to see the problem in new ways.

**How long will counselling take?**

The number of counselling sessions varies from person to person. Many people come just once or for a few sessions. Others come over a greater period of time throughout a term or for longer.

Some people are very clear about what they want to achieve in counselling. They have one or two specific areas they want to explore and they are ready to work at quite a rapid pace.

Other people feel less sure about what is going on in their lives and what they need to do. They may have a lot they want to say but not find it easy.

**How long will counselling take?**

In counselling you decide on the pace and focus of the sessions. Counsellors ensure that you are in charge of the process and will regularly review with you how you feel it is going. Although it is impossible to predict how long counselling will last or exactly the path it will take, the Counsellor will respect your needs and wishes at all points.

**How will I get help?**

We operate an appointments system. You can book a first appointment by phoning our Secretary on 272139, calling in to the office or emailing counselling@abdn.ac.uk. This will be an initial meeting lasting about 30 minutes. It is designed to discuss

- what has prompted you to seek help
- the kind of help you are looking for (if you know!)
- what we can offer
- whether we know of any other services that might also help

At this meeting you might also want to ask about
Sometimes this one brief meeting is enough to discover new possibilities for you to handle your situation. Alternatively, you may decide that counselling is not for you. If, however, you decide that you would like to try ongoing Counselling, the Counsellor will add your name to the waiting list and our Secretary will contact you when a counselling slot becomes available. If you wish to see the same Counsellor who you saw for the Exploratory session you can specify this at the time. Sometimes this may mean that you have to wait longer for counselling if the Counsellor does not currently have any spaces.

Often there may be a wait before there is a space. From then on you have the option of seeing the same counsellor on a regular basis.

**Working together**

We are a well used, busy service and counselling appointments fill up quickly during term time. For this reason we ask you to help us by letting us know as soon as possible if you need to cancel or change an appointment. We also understand that sometimes appointments are missed and contact is lost. If this happens to you and you wish to return to see the same or a different Counsellor you are very welcome to do so.

**How much will it cost?**

The Counselling Service is free to all students and members of staff.

**What about confidentiality?**

Everything you share with your counsellor stays within the Counselling Service. We work within the BACP Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy which means that we cannot discuss anything about you without your permission. This Ethical Framework is available for you to read in the Service or can be downloaded from [www.bacp.co.uk/ethical_framework/](http://www.bacp.co.uk/ethical_framework/)

Our own Code of Practice at the Counselling Service is at the end of this leaflet and can be downloaded from [www.abdn.ac.uk/counselling/code.shtml](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/counselling/code.shtml)

**What do I do if I feel uncomfortable about any aspect of counselling or of the Counselling Service?**

In the first instance we would suggest that you talk about this with your Counsellor. If this is difficult, or you find it too embarrassing, you can ask to talk with the Head of Counselling Service or another Counsellor. It is also possible to arrange to see a different Counsellor if you are not happy or would like a change. If you have a complaint about any aspect of the Service, you can

- make an appointment to discuss it with the Head of the Service.

or

Aberdeen University Counselling Service
[www.abdn.ac.uk/counselling](http://www.abdn.ac.uk/counselling)

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• make an appointment to discuss it with the Head of Student Support Services (tel: 274434), who will investigate it.

or

• make a formal complaint through the professional body, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP). Details about this are available in the Service or www.bacp.co.uk

Counselling Service
Code of Practice
Relating to Confidentiality

All members of the University Counselling Service ascribe to the Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy established by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. A copy of this document is available for reference in the Counselling Service. Our practice is as follows:

1. All clients should be informed about our policy of confidentiality at the outset.

2. The Counselling Service offers the highest level of confidentiality and normally no information will leave the service without the client’s permission.

3. Rarely, there may be exceptional circumstances when the Counsellor feels it necessary to act without the permission of the client. At such a time, the importance of preserving client trust and autonomy will be weighed against the importance of reducing the risk of serious harm to the client or to other people.

4. The decision to break confidentiality without client permission will normally only be done in discussion with the client and after consultation with a supervisor or another experienced Counsellor. (The principles underlying such ethical decision making are detailed in the framework document referred to above).

5. If requests for information about a client are made by their family, friends, members of the University or other parties, the Counsellor or Secretary will suggest that the caller asks the client for the relevant information.

6. Personal information held at the Counselling Service about clients is at present restricted to anonymised records on referrals, letters written on their behalf and material entrusted to the Service for ‘safe-keeping’. This is kept under lock and key and is returned to the client or kept for at least 5 years and then destroyed when their contact with the Counselling Service has ended.

7. Any communication and liaison with colleagues is always undertaken in collaboration with clients. Clients are given copies of any letters written by Counsellors on their behalf.

8. In discussion with the University on matters of policy and practice no information is given which could identify an individual.