

Counselling Service

Information for Students – Contract of engagement

Please read this leaflet which contains important information about what to expect from the Counselling Service and which forms the contract between yourself and the counselling service.



What is Counselling?

Counselling is a confidential, safe space for you to share your past and current worries and personal difficulties.

Our team of qualified and experienced counsellors offer a non-judgemental space to help you to explore your feelings and gain insight into your experiences and how to manage them.

There is no set agenda around what is discussed; it is entirely up to you. Counselling is not there to 'fix' you or provide you with solutions to problems in your life, but, rather, provides a non-judgemental and empathic relationship, where you can be seen and heard. Counselling aims to help you think about what is going on for you, your feelings and what you might want to change.

First Appointment – General Assessment

Your first appointment will be a confidential telephone General Assessment session with a Counsellor. This 20-minute session will allow you to briefly share what has brought you to the service and will help us to decide together what the most appropriate support is for you. The General Assessment is not a counselling session.

Counselling Sessions

At the beginning of your first counselling session, we will explain how counselling works and your counsellor will be able to help you with any questions you may have about the service.

You will be offered up to four (face-to-face, online or telephone) counselling sessions per academic year with the same counsellor, usually at the same time/day each week. Sessions last 50 minutes and will be booked around your timetable availability indicated on your referral form. If your timetable changes, please let us know as soon as possible and we will try to accommodate your new availability as best we can.

Limitations of Access to the Service

We offer a short-term counselling service, however sometimes it may be more appropriate for students to access longer-term therapy or external support. If this is the case, we will work with you to identify the most appropriate support.

If you demonstrate signs of being under the Influence of alcohol or drugs, the appointment will not be able to proceed. We will however discuss with you a plan going forwards.

Late arrival

Please let us know if are going to be late for your session. If you arrive later than the agreed time, it will not be possible to extend your session to compensate for any missed time. If you are more than 15 minutes late, you will lose the session.

Cancellations/missed sessions

If you need to cancel your session, please give at least 24 hours' notice so that we can offer an appointment to someone else.

You will lose your session if:

- you cancel less than 24 hours before your session is due to begin
- you do not attend (DNA) your session without giving prior notice

Repeated cancellations/DNAs may result in the closure of your counselling referral.

If your Counsellor needs to cancel a session, you will be given as much notice as possible and will be offered another appointment as soon as possible.

Finishing sessions

You may finish your counselling sessions at any time, however it is helpful to have an ending session to complete the work undertaken. Please inform your Counsellor of your intention to finish your sessions.

Availability of Sessions / Waiting times / Waiting List

We endeavour to offer an appointment at the earliest opportunity that meets your availability. During peak periods, you may be placed on a waiting list. We will keep in touch with you and, should your support need become urgent, we would ask you to contact us immediately and seek the support of your GP.

If you are in crisis, please visit A&E at your local hospital or call 999 immediately.

Counselling Notes, Data Protection & Security

It is a requirement that your Counsellor keep brief notes of your sessions. These notes are saved securely and in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulations (2018), and are not accessible to anybody outside of the Counselling Service. Personal data is held for a period of 7 years and then destroyed. If you have any queries or concerns, contact the University's Data Protection Officer: GDPR@stmarys.ac.uk

You can access our privacy policy [here](#)

Confidentiality

Your use of the Counselling Service and the content of your sessions are treated as confidential, and are not normally disclosed to anyone else. Exceptions to this are:

1. Supervision:

All Counsellors are required to receive professional supervision of their work to ensure quality of service. Your sessions may be discussed in supervision; however, your identity will remain anonymous. Supervision is undertaken with an experienced practitioner who is not a University staff member.

2. Contact with others at your request:

You may ask us to break confidentiality if you consider this to be in your best interests (e.g.: informing your course tutor). Requests to share your information will need to be made in writing with proof of ID.

3. Serious risk of harm to yourself or others:

If we believe either you or someone else is at serious risk of harm, we may take steps to minimise and/or monitor this risk. In exceptional circumstances, we may be required to break confidentiality – including disclosures about terrorist activity or if there is serious concern about a child or vulnerable person. Where possible, any action would usually be discussed with you first. If you have any concerns about confidentiality, please discuss these with your Counsellor.

Code of Practice, Complaints & Conflicts of Interest

We hope that your experience of counselling is helpful and rewarding. If, however, you are unhappy with any aspect of the Service, please discuss this in the first instance with your Counsellor, or with the Head of Student Services. If you are still unhappy, you may make a formal complaint by following the Student Complaints Procedure.

The Counselling Service works within the Ethical Framework of the British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (BACP), a copy of which is available on www.bacp.co.uk. If you think your counsellor has acted in a way contrary to their respective ethical framework and professional standards, you can raise a concern through the BACP.

Client Feedback

We value and use your feedback to improve the quality of the service we provide. On completion of your sessions, we will send you a link to a short online Client Satisfaction Questionnaire. This is a good opportunity for you to share your views on the service you received. The results are analysed anonymously for our Annual Report.

Contact Details

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