

Personal Counselling Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

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What is counselling?

Counselling is a process of helping you use your own and other resources in answering your questions or solving your dilemmas. Sometimes, things have changed for you and counselling is the place where you can get "back on track" or "sort things out" so that you can go back to the way things were before the change. Other times, the difficulty you are experiencing is a lack of change and you can use counselling to improve your understanding, situation, relationships, or outlook on life.



How can counselling help me?

Counselling can help you in many ways. Personal counselling consists primarily of collaborating with one of our Masters level trained staff; either Registered Psychologists, or Registered Clinical Social Worker in order to work on your goals for change in your life (for example: handling a crisis, improving relationships, dealing with feelings of depression or anxiety). We also offer career counselling and workshops. Please contact our office, the Counselling and Career Centre, at 403 343-4064 or stop room 1402 to speak with someone.



Adapted from <http://www.ucalgary.ca/counselling/> FAQ

What should I do if I'm in crisis after hours?

Please refer to our Emergency and Crisis section: [After-hours emergencies](#). You also always have the option of calling 911 or visiting your local hospital.



What kind of training do counsellors have?

The counsellors at the Counselling & Career Centre are trained as Registered Psychologists or Registered Social Workers. This means they have met the requirements for education and supervised practices set out by the Psychology Profession Act and Regulation or the College of Alberta Social Workers and have Masters Degrees in counselling psychology or social work.



Is counselling confidential?

The information shared in counselling will be kept confidential and released only with your permission, or, in very rare circumstances, if required by law or professional ethical guidelines. For example, if you were potentially at risk to hurt yourself or another person, you were discussing situations involving a risk of abuse to children or other dependent persons, or there was a subpoena for your files by a court of law, then counsellors are under ethical and legal obligations to disclose this information. In most cases this would be discussed with you prior to the release of information. If you are under the age of 18, your parents/guardians may be able, in some instances, to obtain information about your counselling.



What is a counselling intake session?

Everyone who is new to our services goes through an intake session. First, you will be asked to fill out a form and take a seat in the waiting area. When it is your turn a Counsellor will meet with you to discuss your concerns. A brief, 20 minute assessment will be conducted and you will be informed of the services and resources which are likely to best serve your needs. You may be referred to services within our department, within other areas of the college or to resources in the community.

Waiting times will vary depending on the number of new clients, and the nature of their concerns. While we do our best to provide rapid service, crises may arise, thereby delaying your appointment.

The intake session is only a general assessment in which a snapshot of your concerns will be taken. You will have ample opportunity to go into thorough detail and obtain specific assistance from the referrals which are provided to you.



Do I need to prepare for my session?

To make the most of your intake or first session, you might want to prepare to explain with your counsellor what your primary concern is, what your questions are, how you think and feel about your concern, and what you have done so far to resolve it. After that, you will work with your ongoing counsellor on your concern.

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Through collaboration, you and your counsellor will decide on ways to make changes, and you may be trying out new ideas or strategies between sessions so you should be prepared to talk about these changes when you arrive at your counselling session. The more you are able to translate ideas into action, the more changes you will see in your life.



Am I wasting your time with my problem?

NO. Many students who access our services feel hesitant at first for a variety of reasons, including the belief that their problem is not important. We believe that if it is important to you, then it is important to us. Please remember that we are here to help and that we are glad to work with you on whatever issues you would like to bring to counselling. Some of the common concerns that students bring to counselling are: personal growth, self-esteem, stress, depression, anxiety, relationship concerns, career decisions, academic difficulties, and making various transitions. For some students one session is sufficient, for others on-going counselling may be best suited to their unique needs.



Will my sessions be recorded? Who will have access?

Occasionally counsellors ask your permission to record (videotape) counselling sessions so that they can review the sessions at a later date or use them in supervision in order to improve their ability to help you. If your counsellor is seeking your permission to record sessions, they will outline the purpose and use of the records. Most often, only your counsellor and their supervisor access sessions. Please be assured that every effort is made to maintain the security of the tapes; they are kept in locked cabinets at the Counselling Centre and erased after use.



Can you refer me to a psychiatrist?

Yes. If you are interested in seeing a psychiatrist, please speak with your counsellor and they can suggest ways that you can see one. Another way is to visit your family doctor or the [Health, Safety & Wellness Centre](#) (Room 901) and be seen by the physician who can refer you to a community Psychiatrist.



What is the difference between your staff psychologist and a psychiatrist?

A psychologist has received advanced education in understanding human emotion, thought, and behavior. A psychologist has also received training in the provision of psychological services including counselling, assessment (using tests to understand you better), and professional ethics (standards of behavior for all psychologists). In Alberta, any person practicing with the title of "Psychologist" must be registered with and regulated by the [College of Alberta Psychologists](#).

A Psychiatrist is a medical doctor who has specialized in the treatment of mental disorders. A psychiatrist may practice counselling/psychotherapy and is also able to prescribe and monitor medications appropriate for the treatment of mental health concerns.

A Social Worker endeavors to enhance the problem-solving and coping capacities of people; help people better use resources in their environment; and effect changes in society towards the social justice for all (*taken from Alberta College Of Social Worker website*). The [Alberta College of Social Workers](#) is the designated regulatory body for the province of Alberta.



Will you tell me to take medications?

We do not and cannot prescribe medications. Occasionally, we may suggest that you speak to a doctor either to rule out physical causes of your problems or to discuss medications.



Can my parents find out I'm coming for counselling?

If you are **under** the age of 18, your parents/guardians may be able to obtain information about your counselling, although this rarely happens. If this is a concern, please discuss this with your counsellor and he/she can clarify for you how such a situation, of your parents requesting information, would be handled. If you are 18 or older the information shared in counselling will be kept confidential and released only with your permission, or, in very rare circumstances, if required by law.



Do you offer family counselling?

Although much of our counselling is done on an individual basis, we also provide couples counselling as long as both members of the couple are a RDC student.



I feel like I'm going to hurt myself. Am I suicidal?

If you are feeling that you might hurt yourself please seek professional help by seeing a counsellor, your family doctor, visit the hospital, or call the suicide help line (1.800.784.2433). If it is during the hours of 9:00-4:30 Monday to Friday, when the Counselling & Career Centre is open, please drop in and ask to speak to a counsellor immediately. If it is after hours please consider one of the options listed above.

Please remember that if you are having these feelings, seek some assistance immediately. Also see [.Emergency or a Crisis.pdf](#)



I think my friend is suicidal/depressed/needs counselling. What can I do?

Fortunately, there are ways to help your friend if you think he/she might be going through a tough emotional time. If you think your friend is suicidal, please read the Canadian Mental Health Association pamphlet "[Preventing Suicide](#)" that explains how you can talk and listen to a suicidal person. You can also drop in to see a counsellor and talk about ways that you can help your friend and care for yourself when he/she is feeling suicidal. Also, remember that you can always call the Suicide Help Line (1.800.784.2433) if you need someone to talk to.

If you suspect that a friend is feeling depressed/anxious/upset and could benefit from counselling, there are many ways to help. The type of help that each person needs can be very different so you may need to ask your friend how you can best help. Perhaps he/she needs someone to talk to, take him/her out for a while, or just be there so the person doesn't feel alone. If you feel that counselling could help, then let your friend know that too; perhaps by sharing your own stories of how counselling has helped you or someone you know. You may be afraid that your friend will take your suggestions the wrong way, but as long as you are communicating your care and concern then he/she should see that your concern is in their best interests. You could also come in and meet with one of our counsellors to discuss your concerns and options to assist your friend and yourself.



How do I know if I'm depressed?

If you feel that you might be depressed, please come in to the Counselling & Career Centre and speak with one of our counsellors. Symptoms that may indicate you are depressed include the following:

- Persistent sad, anxious, or "empty" mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies or activities that were once enjoyed, including sex
- Restlessness, irritability
- Crying more than usual
- Feelings of hopelessness, pessimism
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness, helplessness
- Withdrawn or isolated from family, friends, people in general
- Decreased energy, fatigue, being "slowed down"
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering, making decisions
- Inability to sleep or oversleeping
- Changes in appetite or weight
- Persistent physical symptoms that do not respond to treatment, such as headaches, digestive disorders, and chronic pain
- Thoughts of death or suicide; suicide attempts
- **NOTE:** If you are feeling suicidal please seek professional help by seeing a counsellor, your family doctor, visit the hospital, or call the suicide help line (1.800.784.2433).



How do I know if I'm having a panic attack?

Panic attacks are the result of excessive nervousness, anxiety, or fear. The [Canadian Mental Health Association](#) describes "panic attacks which occur without warning, accompanied by sudden feelings of terror. Physically, an attack may cause chest pain, heart palpitations, and shortness of breath, dizziness, and abdominal discomfort, feelings of unreality and fear of dying." If you feel that you may have suffered from a panic attack there are several ways that you can overcome this difficulty.

It may be a good idea to speak with your family doctor or to a doctor at [Health, Safety & Wellness Centre](#) (Room 901) so that physical causes can be ruled out and suggest effective treatment, including medication if appropriate. Individual counselling is of course available, just drop in to the Counselling & Career Centre and start by seeing a counsellor for an intake session.



I blanked out on a test – what happened?

There are many reasons that your performance may have been less than optimal during a test situation. Ask yourself: Did I prepare adequately? Did I get enough sleep? Was I distracted by something else going on in my life? Did I have too much caffeine? Did I have enough to eat?

If you don't think any of these issues affected your test writing ability, the problem may be that you were overly anxious during the exam. Many students feel anxious when writing tests and exams, and most of the time a little bit of anxiety is beneficial by getting us going so we can respond quickly and efficiently (what athletes call being "in the zone").

If you blanked out on a test it is likely that you were feeling too anxious and this negatively impacted your concentration, memory, and thinking skills. This is what we refer to as Test Anxiety. It is not unexpected that you might "blow" one test but if your test performance is consistently decreased by anxiety (Do your grades always drop after the final?), then it is likely that you could benefit from some new strategies.

Fortunately, the Counselling & Career Centre offers several resources that can help you. If you think your anxiety is due to Test Anxiety, just drop in and start by seeing a counsellor for an intake session.



What should I do if I think I was date raped?

The aftermath of acquaintance sexual assault, or date rape, is often times a difficult experience to go through alone. Such experiences may impact one's cognitive, behavioral, emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being. It can help to talk to someone, such as a close friend, family member or counsellor who can be trusted to listen, rather than to judge. Being judged or given advice may not be helpful at all and contribute to feelings of not having control over one's life. It can also be important to seek a medical assessment or consultation from your family doctor, a doctor at the [Health, Safety & Wellness Centre](#) (Room 901) or at the hospital.

Talking to a counsellor can be a helpful way of receiving support in general, discussing the feelings associated with the experience, working through some difficult feelings about self and others, taking steps to find ways to best manage academic requirements and other responsibilities amidst the aftermath of date rape. The counsellor is also able to assist with decision making around such key areas as managing school course load, seeking legal advice, connecting with other college or community resources, choosing to whom you will disclose/not disclose, managing new relationships, and other pertinent areas of life. The important aspect of counselling is that the individual is given the freedom to exercise choice in decision-making.



If I tell you I was abused as a child, will you report it?

Under certain circumstances we are legally required to report child abuse but your counsellor will discuss this with you and will try to work with you to make the best decision about reporting abuse. All Albertans are legally obligated to report ongoing child abuse in order to protect children (under the age of eighteen) when they are unable to protect themselves.

Adapted from <http://www.ucalgary.ca/counselling/> FAQ

If abuse may still be happening to other children, we may be required to report. If there is no current abuse happening, to you or other children, then our concern lies with you and what is most therapeutic for you. You can speak with your counsellor about what will be most helpful for you and the safest, most therapeutic ways of going about dealing with this past trauma.



I was sexually abused as a child. How can counselling help me?

Childhood sexual abuse results when a child is used for sexual gratification by an older adolescent or adult. It involves the abuse of power that an adult has over a child. In many instances, the victim of the abuse has never discussed the abuse with others while it was taking place. As an adult, this individual is now learning to address the effects of the abuse. Counselling can play an important part in addressing the effects of the abuse and enabling an individual to move beyond the effects of the abuse. Each individual's experiences and responses are unique to that individual. However, there are some responses that are common. These include: low self esteem, difficulty trusting people, difficulty sleeping, and use of mechanisms (e.g., drugs, alcohol, food, or self-injury) to cope. Given the college years, where career path, relationships, academic performance, and life direction are of critical importance, counselling can play a key role in addressing past abuse.

Specifically, counselling can involve the following:

- exploring and identifying inner resources and personal strengths that have been/are key to healing
- enhancing coping mechanisms and strategies so that healthy strategies are built into daily living
- finding ways to put responsibility and blame for the abuse in its proper place (the abuser)
- Addressing choices in beliefs/thoughts, emotions, and behaviors that enhance healing and healthy living.

If you feel counselling would be helpful to you in dealing with past abuse please come in and speak to a counsellor for an intake session.



How can I improve my relationship with my partner?

The answer to this question varies greatly depending upon the difficulties you are experiencing and the improvements you, and your partner, would like to experience in your relationship. You are of course welcome to access counselling by dropping in to the Counselling & Career Centre to do an initial intake session.



My professor thinks I have a problem. Do I have to come to counselling?

If your professor suggested that you come to counselling, it is likely that the professor did so thinking that you could benefit from the services we provide. Please feel welcome to try our services out to see if they will be useful to you. Remember that all of our services are voluntary and confidential; you will not be forced to come here if you don't want to, and we will not reveal that you have come to counselling to your professor unless you request we do so.



Will this be like Dr. Phil?

Not really. Although Dr. Phil does have a background in psychology and is able to help a lot of people, what he does could not accurately be called psychotherapy or counselling. What is similar between Dr. Phil and counselling is that by talking to a counsellor you will be talking to someone who is there to help, you will be able to find answers to your questions or solutions to problems, and will likely find new ways to look at things. Counselling is also very different from Dr. Phil in many important ways. One of the most important differences is that counselling is confidential (no one will see or hear what you talk about in counselling on TV), which is one of the things that the students we help appreciate the most about counselling. Another important difference is that you will likely meet with your counsellor on an on-going basis (depending upon your needs) which gives you the opportunity to form a respectful, collaborative, working alliance (an important contributor to the success of counselling).



I read a self-help book, what do I do now?

A lot of people are helped by reading self-help books (what counsellors call "bibliotherapy") especially when they are able to translate psychological principles into appreciable change in thoughts, behaviors and emotion. Sometimes it can be difficult to translate general principles into effective strategies that fit your particular circumstances. By talking with a counsellor, perhaps even just a few times, you may be able to find ways to make things that you read fit for you.

Also, sometimes people find it helpful to have someone to talk to so that they can report back all of the successes they are experiencing, and find solutions to any problems they might encounter.

