

Bristol University Counselling Service

A free, confidential service for students

Understanding the Counselling Agreement

A Guide for Students

What is a Counselling Agreement?

All students who use the Counselling Service will be asked to sign a Counselling Agreement and will be given a copy to take away. This Agreement lays out the framework for the services we offer and helps us to find an agreed way of working together. This leaflet gives detailed information of the principles and practices which underpin the Counselling Agreement. You may also wish to consult the Confidentiality Policy of the Counselling Service for more detailed information.

We wish to uphold our professional standards and offer a safe space for you to explore your concerns. For this reason:

1. We work according to the guidelines and Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy produced by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, of which we are a member. These can be viewed on http://www.bacp.co.uk/ethical_framework/

About the work of offer

2. We will always offer you a choice in the way you wish to work with us: 1:1 work, workshops, therapeutic groups, drop-ins or supported self help programmes. You can move from one way of working to another as appropriate to your needs.

3. Our practitioners come from a range of different theoretical backgrounds and trainings and are all able to integrate theories in order to provide the best support to you in your particular needs. If there is a particular way of working you would favour please discuss this in your Initial Assessment Session and we will endeavour to accommodate you.

About our Counsellors

4. All of our counsellors have received sufficient training and experience to work with clients within the service, and receive clinical supervision on a regular basis. All of our counsellors are accountable to the service for the quality and appropriateness of the work they offer. If you wish to change counsellors we will always endeavour to accommodate you. Please speak with your counsellor about this in the first instance or notify the office.

5. The majority of our practitioners are fully qualified as counsellors or psychotherapists and they may also be accredited by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy or registered by the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy. We also make use of trainee counsellors on placement who are in the final stages of their training. These trainee counsellors receive higher levels of support and supervision. When having 1:1 work you will always be asked at the outset whether you would be willing to work with a trainee and you have the right to refuse in which case you will be allocated a fully qualified practitioner. Trainees may also assist fully qualified practitioners in group work.

6. If you have any concerns about the counselling you have received you should raise this with your counsellor or group facilitator in the first instance and then, if necessary, with the Head of Service. We will respond quickly to any complaints made and seek to correct any errors on our part.

About our record keeping

7. We keep notes of all our communication with you and a record of every session, along with any other relevant correspondence concerning you (such as letters to us from your GP/tutor or communications between counsellor and Head of Service etc..) These are kept in a confidential file (either on computer or in paper form) which is kept securely under the guidelines laid down by the Data Protection Act. You have the right to see your file and/or receive a copy of your file and your counsellor or office staff will be able to outline the process for doing this. Your notes can only be accessed by appropriate employees within the Counselling Service and are not available to other staff in the university. We would only produce your notes for others to read if you request it in writing or if required to by a court of law.

8. If you need us to write a letter for your tutor or department for any reason please speak with your counsellor.

About Attendance

9. If you wish to receive a series of sessions of 1:1 counselling we will agree an approximate number of sessions to work with you, based on your present needs, and will offer opportunities to review this work on a regular basis. If you wish to end counselling before the end of this agreement you are free to do so and we would ask you to let us know in good time so that your place can be re-allocated without loss of time in the service. If you choose to take part in group counselling it will ordinarily be expected that you will commit to attend for the whole course of the group.

10. We will always endeavour to give you good notice if for any reason we need to cancel or change the time of a session that has been arranged. We ask that you also give us as much notice as possible if you have to cancel a session or are unable to attend a group (Ideally 48 hours). We would ask you to prioritise your counselling session within your week as you are likely to gain most benefit by attending all sessions that have been arranged.

11. If you miss a session without telling us we will contact you to clarify whether you want a further session.

Telling us what you think

12. We are always happy to receive feedback about our services and you will be asked to complete an evaluation at the end of your work with us. Information from the evaluation will be used to inform our practice and may

be reproduced in our reporting to the university and in our publicity material in disguised form.

13. We routinely make use of questionnaires within counselling to monitor your psychological state and to gather information about your progress. You will be asked to complete a COREnet questionnaire (of 34 questions) within an Initial Assessment session and will then be asked to complete either 34 or 10 questions before all subsequent sessions. Data is stored anonymously and securely so your identity is protected. Your counsellor may wish to discuss your COREnet profile within counselling sessions to help you review your progress and needs. We will also sometimes use this information in anonymous form, to gather statistics about the issues clients bring and the impact of counselling, which we may wish to use in our statistical reporting to the university. If you request a letter for extenuating circumstances we may discuss with you the value of sharing this information with others.

About your privacy

14. We wish to uphold your right to privacy and as a result we will always give you the opportunity to discuss the confidentiality framework with us. As a service we are bound by certain university requirements and also by the law so it is not possible to offer complete confidentiality in all circumstances.

15. The following principles will be upheld in our practice as far as the university and the law allows:

- a) We will not disclose to others that you are attending counselling.
- b) We will not disclose the content of 1:1 or group sessions to others.
- c) We will always agree a confidentiality framework for group work.

There are four key circumstances in which we may need to disclose your identity and/or the work you are engaged in:

- a) If it is necessary for us to discuss our work with you within the Counselling Service and in external supervision of our work in order to ensure that you are given the best possible service. Any such discussions will be carried out respectfully and where possible anonymously.
- b) If you give consent for us to liaise with other members of the Student Services team, university staff, or other professionals in order to offer you joint care. If you decide to give consent for liaison to take place your counsellor will discuss with you what you are happy to be disclosed. This is set out explicitly in the Counselling Agreement.
- c) If we are required by law to disclose information. This may be of particular relevance in the case of prevention of terrorism, serious crime or child protection.
- d) If we believe that you are a serious risk to yourself or others, in which case we may wish to take action to minimise the risk. We would always try to talk to you about this first.

About your particular needs

If you have particular requirements from counselling (such as needing to see a deaf counsellor or to have an interpreter, or the need to be seen in a room with Disabled access) we will endeavour to accommodate your needs.

If you have any questions or concerns relating to this Information leaflet please contact us and we will endeavour to answer any questions you may have.

For more information contact us:

We are based on the 3rd Floor of Hampton House, St Michael's Hill, Bristol BS6 6AU. We also make use of rooms on the Lower Ground Floor for both individual and Group work.

We are open every week day during term time.

Counselling sessions are available between 9am-8pm Monday-Thursday and 9-5pm on Friday.

Call in any weekday between 9-4 to speak to our Reception Staff

Phone 0117 954 6655

Fill in a booking form to book an individual session or a place on a workshop or group by visiting our website on www.bris.ac.uk/student-counselling