

COUNSELLING SERVICES FOR STUDENTS

TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS IN HONG KONG



The Hong Kong Tertiary Institutions Psychological Counselling Working Group



Members of VTC Group VTC 職訓機構



1A

What is counselling and what can students expect from counselling?

- Counselling provides students with an opportunity to share their personal experiences and struggles with a counsellor in a **safe and private environment**.
- Through establishing a strong and **trustful therapist-client relationship**, students and their counsellors can work together towards a **mutually agreed therapy goal**.
- Students are guided by counsellors to **develop and understand their own perspectives or emotions and to explore different options** and more adaptive coping strategies before making a decision. Counselling is not about a quick-fix solution, lecturing or disciplining.
- The counselling process varies from student to student, depending on the presenting issue(s), the participation and commitment of the student, as well as the resources available in the institution.



1B

How is counselling different from academic advising?

- While **academic advising** focuses on **providing academic information and advice** to students, **psychological counselling** focus on **rendering emotional and psychosocial support**. It is not necessary for the counsellors to offer advice during the counselling process.
- Counsellors may discuss different issues with students that are not directly related to their study. For instance, mental health concerns, emotion awareness and management, university life adjustment, personal and family issues, and relationship-building etc.
- In the **academic advising session**, an academic advisor provides guidance on academic requirements in order to **help students to complete their programme**, such as helping students to plan and achieve their study goals, providing study skills, discussing a study path and offering educational advice.



2

Why are counselling services private and confidential?

- When students decide to meet with a counsellor, they need a safe emotional space to talk about their life adversities and mental health concerns. A student may be going through stressful experiences, traumatic life events, fear of judgement and an emotional roller coaster ride of mental health symptoms. S/he may feel embarrassed, vulnerable or a sense of shame, and may be reluctant to share his/her private feelings and secrets if s/he does not feel **safe** and **comfortable** in the counselling environment.
- It is of utmost importance for counsellors to gain **trust** from students and build **rapport** with them to ensure the effectiveness of counselling. Sometimes, the discussion may involve substance use, sexual activity, and other more sensitive issues.
- **Confidentiality protects students' personal experiences and the therapeutic relationship.** Nevertheless, there are exceptions that confidentiality may not be upheld, particularly if the counsellor is significantly concerned about the safety of the student or another person(s).

3

When a student becomes emotional during a conversation, what can I do?

- Emotional reactions, such as shedding tears or sounding irritable, are a **natural response to challenges and frustrations**.
- **Listen with patience and without making judgement. Reflect** the emotion with empathy to make the student feel like s/he is being heard. **Paraphrase his/her words and meaning** to let the student feels being understood.
- If the student feels that s/he is at an impasse, **allow flexibility and alternatives** that might lead to a new direction for resolution.
- If the student has difficulty in controlling his/her emotions and/ or the situation sounds threatening, you may **acknowledge his/her emotions by saying “I hear you...”**. Suggesting a brief break and checking out the student's **instant need such as water or a blanket** to keep warm may sooth his/her emotions. You may offer to line up immediate emotional support for the student and seek advice from the counselling service at the University. Sometimes, it may help if you or a colleague **accompanies the student** to a counselling centre.
- The situation is urgent if you believe the student is at risk of immediate harm to self or others. **Don't leave the student alone**. Ask a colleague for extra support. **Contact the university emergency numbers or community crisis hotlines for help**.
- Allow yourself room to rest and seek advice from professionals when you are taking care of the student.



4

If a student is talking or behaving oddly and leading me to suspect that s/he may be psychotic, what can I do?



APPROACH THE STUDENT AND BE SUPPORTIVE

- Some common psychotic symptoms include odd ideas, incoherent speech, difficulty in differentiating reality from false beliefs, unusual sensory experiences, bizarre behaviors and inappropriate emotions.
- Approach the student in a **caring and non-judgmental** manner. Remain calm and be gentle.
- Approach the student in a place that is **safe and comfortable** for the student to share.
- Make sure that you have **access to an exit**.
- **Express your concern** on the specific behavior or change you have observed and avoid speculating about the student's diagnosis.
- **Allow the student to talk** about his/her experiences.
- Focus on what is troubling the student and **empathize with his/her feelings**, e.g., "It must be terrible to feel like people keep checking on you"
- **Avoid arguing with the student**, or confronting or confirming his/her **delusions** (false beliefs) or **hallucination** (perceiving things that are not real).
- Use **simple wording** and **short sentences**.
- Ask the student if s/he has had similar experiences before and if s/he has **ways of handling it that have been helpful in the past**.



4B

ENCOURAGE THE STUDENT TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL HELP

- If the student is currently receiving help, or has ever received help from a medical/ mental health professionals, **encourage him/her to seek advice from them.**
- If the student has never received professional help, encourage him/her to do so.
- Ask if the student has anyone s/he trusts (e.g. family, close friends, hostel staff) who can accompany him/her to seek professional help.
- **Provide information** on the resources available on campus and in the community.
- Seek the student's **consent to be referred** to the campus counselling service.
- If the student refuses to seek help, encourage him/her to talk to someone s/he trusts. Remain friendly and supportive. **Continue to follow up on the student** and provide emotional support. S/he might be more receptive to seeking help later.
- **Consult a counsellor** on the ways of handling or making a referral.
- **Call campus security** for emergency help if you believe the student is **at imminent risk** of harming oneself or others.



5

If a student refuses to seek help, what can I do and how can I encourage him/her to seek counselling?

- If the student rejects the idea of seeking help from a counsellor, you can show your care by asking about **his/her concerns**, showing **understanding and addressing** them one by one.
- If the student attaches stigma to counselling, you can explain **getting help is normal** for college students as it is common to experience some challenges during college years.
- Assure the student that **help seeking behavior** is a **sign of strength and resilience** rather than vulnerability.
- Assure the student that **counselling is confidential**.
- Encourage the student to **try counselling at least once** and see how things go. Resistance can sometimes be alleviated by **giving choices or options**. S/he can decide whether s/he wishes to continue the counselling service later on.
- If the student does not want to see a counsellor at that moment, staff should **respect the decision** and encourage him/her to seek help when s/he is ready. Staff could also give the student **community resources information** and encourage him/her to call the **community hotlines** when s/he is in need.

6

Is there anything a teacher or staff member can contribute to make the counselling process more effective?

- Observe the student's behaviour. If necessary, **show your care and bring up the option to seek counselling again**.
- If the student refuses, contact any counsellor when appropriate (especially if the student **presents a potential risk of causing harm to oneself or others**) to discuss what can be done.
- **Consider flexible arrangements if appropriate** to alleviate stress and instill hope (e.g. academic arrangement).
- **If you are concerned about the student's progress in the counselling process, check with the student directly.**

CONTACT INFORMATION

Counselling Service
Student Development Services
CITY UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
Tel: 3442 8478
Email: socs@cityu.edu.hk

Wellness and Counselling Centre
Office of Student Affairs
THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
Tel: 3943 7208 / 3943 3493
Email: wacc@cuhk.edu.hk

Student Counselling and Development Services
School of Continuing and Professional Studies
THE CHINESE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
Tel: 3943 9106
Email: scds@scs.cuhk.edu.hk

Counselling Services
Student Affairs Office
THE EDUCATION UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
Tel: 2948 6245
Email: saocs@eduhk.hk

Counselling and Development Centre
Office of Student Affairs
HONG KONG BAPTIST UNIVERSITY
Tel: 3411 7435
Email: cdc@hkbu.edu.hk

Student Development Office
THE HONG KONG INSTITUTE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION /
HONG KONG DESIGN INSTITUTE
<http://www.vtc.edu.hk/sd/>

Office of Student Affairs
HONG KONG SHUE YAN UNIVERSITY
Tel: 2806 5160
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Counselling and Person Enrichment Section
Centre of Development and Resources for Students
THE UNIVERSITY OF HONG KONG
Tel: 3917 8388
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Student Development and Counselling Services
HKU SPACE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
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Counseling and Wellness Center
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