

Vassar College Counseling Service
Client Information and Informed Consent for Services

Welcome to the Vassar College Counseling Service (VCCS). We provide individual, couple, and group counseling, assessment, consultation, referral, and campus outreach services to the Vassar community. Services are free of charge and available to currently enrolled, full-time students. This document contains information for potential clients. Please read it carefully and discuss any questions you have with your counselor.

Introduction to Counseling

The experience of counseling varies depending on the counselor, the client, and the concerns that the client brings. There are a variety of approaches that may be used to address your concerns. In general, the process involves you speaking about your issues openly and honestly, while your counselor listens, asks you questions, and works with you to address your concerns. You should expect to be able to discuss with your counselor any issue you have, whether about the problems you bring or about the process of counseling itself.

Risks and Benefits

Counseling has both benefits and risks. Risks sometimes include experiencing uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anxiety, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. Counseling may involve recalling unpleasant aspects of your personal history. In addition, counseling may result in your choosing to make changes in your current relationships. The benefits that can result from engaging in this process include a significant reduction of feelings of distress, improved relationships, resolution of specific problems, increased self-esteem and self-awareness. Although there are no guaranteed outcomes, most students who use our services find that the benefits outweigh the risks.

First Appointment

In the interest of accommodating a maximum number of clients, initial appointments are made on a first-come, first-served basis with special consideration for urgent requests.

Your first scheduled visit to the Counseling Service is considered a “consultation”, and it will generally last from 20 to 50 minutes. You will be asked to arrive 20 minutes early to complete initial paperwork. You will meet with a counselor to discuss your concerns and together you will select the best resources for your difficulties. If the level of services offered at Counseling Services seems sufficient to help you resolve your concerns and if you decide to continue counseling, your counselor will schedule a second appointment. If the counselor determines that you would be better served by another agency, they will make a referral to an appropriate resource in the community.

Subsequent Appointments

Counseling sessions are scheduled as available and appropriate. Due to the demand of our service, you can expect to meet with your counselor every other week. There are some circumstances in which you may meet with your counselor more or less frequently. Regularly scheduled sessions usually last 45-50 minutes, whereas walk in clinic sessions usually last 20-30 minutes. Generally, therapy at the Counseling Service is relatively short-term, proceeding on the basis of weeks rather than years.

It is important for you to arrive to your appointments on time. You may be asked to reschedule your appointment if you are more than 15 minutes late for a full session, and 10 minutes late for a shorter appointment.

If you need to cancel or reschedule your appointment, please call ahead, preferably 24 hours in advance. If you miss a session without notifying us, the appointment may go unused since the time is reserved exclusively for you. Please bear in mind that there may be others waiting to be seen who could use appointments you do not intend to use. If you are thinking of ending your counseling we suggest that you discuss your decision with your counselor before you stop. Your counselor can help identify possible future options.

Limits to Service

Because we are a no-fee agency with limited staff resources, we must place some restrictions on the amount of services we can offer. Although we do not limit the number of sessions a student can have, we emphasize a short-term counseling focus. If you require services beyond the scope of what we can provide, we will refer you to other resources within the community. Much of our focus is on helping you reach educational goals and working to remove blocks to that process.

The Counseling Service does not provide evaluation for disability accommodations, including ADHD evaluations. Counselors also do not serve as witnesses in legal or Title 9 proceedings except when required by law. Instead, clients may request a written treatment summary and/or contact information for local assessment providers or forensic specialists.

Confidentiality, Ethics and Professional Records

The ethical codes of the American Psychological Association, the National Association of Social Workers, and the American Mental Health Counselors Association as well as the laws of New York guide the policies of Vassar College Counseling Service. The staff of the Counseling Center pledges to uphold legal and ethical codes as well as institutional requirements.

Confidentiality

The information you share with your counselor is confidential. The Counseling Service reserves the right to determine if you are able to keep yourself safe, if you are a danger to others, and if you are unable to exercise good judgment.

The exceptions to the rule of confidentiality are the following:

1. If you are clearly likely to do imminent and serious physical harm to yourself in the near future and cannot guarantee you can keep yourself safe, it is your counselor's duty to keep you safe. In this exceptional case, your counselor may share information relevant to your safety with select parties, such as Administrator on Call, the Associate Dean of the College for Residential Life and Wellness, or hospital or emergency personnel as appropriate. In the state of New York, "mental health professionals are required to report to their local director of community services (DCS) or his/her designees when, in their reasonable professional judgment, one of their patients is 'likely to engage in conduct that would result in serious harm to self or others.'" The purpose of reporting this information is to prevent these individuals from being able to purchase firearms. For more information, go to <https://safeact.ny.gov/mental-health-faq>.
2. If you are clearly likely to do imminent and serious physical harm to others in the near future and cannot guarantee you can keep others safe, it is your counselor's duty to keep others safe. In this exceptional case, your counselor may share information relevant to your safety with select parties, such as Administrator on Call, the Associate Dean of the College for Student Living and Wellness, or hospital or emergency personnel as appropriate. In the state of New York, "mental health professionals are required to report to their local director of community services (DCS) or his/her designees when, in their reasonable professional judgment, one of their patients is 'likely to engage in conduct that would result in serious harm to self or others.'" The purpose of

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3. If you share information about the current abuse or neglect of anyone under 18 or a vulnerable adult, or the possibility that such individuals are vulnerable to or witness abuse or neglect, your counselor may be required by state law to report that information to the Department of Social Services in the state where the abuse occurs.
4. If you are seventeen or younger, your parents have legal access to your counseling records and will need to grant permission for you to be seen at VCCS for on-going treatment
5. If you are involved in a court proceeding in which a judge provides your counselor with a court order to provide records, your counselor would be required to do so. Such a situation may arise in child custody proceedings or in proceedings in which your emotional condition is an important element.
6. The VCCS psychiatrist must abide by the NY Internet System for Tracking Over-Prescribing (I-STOP) Act, which regulates prescriptions for controlled substances. Please go to: <https://www.oasas.ny.gov/StopRxMisuse/resources.cfm> for more information.

VCCS is considered a confidential resource on campus, which means that we are not required to disclose information related to sexual assault to anyone outside of the Counseling Service.

Records

The Counseling Service keeps records as regulated by the New York State Mental Health Code. Maintenance of records is in accordance with professional, legal, and ethical guidelines. Other than authorized Counseling Service staff, no one, including College officials, faculty, parents, potential employers, among others have access to any of your records without your written permission. An Authorization to Release Information Form is used for written permission.

You have the right to have access to your treatment records. Because these records contain information that can be misinterpreted by someone who is not a mental health professional, the policy of the Counseling Service is to have your counselor review your records with you. If your counselor is no longer at the Counseling Service when you request your records, another counselor will be available to review them with you. We are willing to release your records to another mental health professional with your written permission.

The Counseling Service uses an electronic recordkeeping program for current client records. All records, hard copy or electronic, are destroyed after seven years following your last contact with the Counseling Service. If you have any questions about your record, please speak with your counselor or with the director of the Counseling Service.

Staff

The staff of the Counseling Service consists of experienced mental health clinicians. Your counselor may consult with other counselors on staff to provide you with the highest quality services possible. If your counselor receives supervision, the information you share with your counselor may be reviewed by a supervisor to ensure that you are receiving the highest quality of service. It is your right to know the name of your counselor's supervisor and to contact them directly. You may also contact the Director, Dr. Wendy Freedman, with comments or concerns you may have about your treatment at any time.

Anonymous data are compiled on Counseling Service activities and from time to time Counseling Service staff members make presentations and write articles as part of their work in a college academic and research setting. In these instances, specific identifying information is absent and case material is disguised.

Counselors do not accept friend or contact requests from current or former clients on any social networking site (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, etc.)

Psychiatric Services

A consulting psychiatrist is affiliated with the Counseling Service. Any student who wishes to see the consulting psychiatrist must be a client in on-going counseling at the Counseling Service, up to the limits of the services we can provide.

The consulting psychiatrist provides psychiatric consultation, evaluation for psychotropic medications, and monitoring of medications prescribed. The Counseling Service does not provide emergency psychiatric evaluations or emergency prescription services. The Counseling Service partners with the Health Service, where students may be able to get prescription refills in between sessions with the VCCS psychiatrist.

Emergency psychiatric services are available 24 hours/day at Mid-Hudson Regional Hospital, Emergency Services. The consulting psychiatrist is not contracted to work with VCCS in the summer, so it is necessary that students seek off campus psychiatry services during that time for ongoing medication management.

Should you need psychiatric services beyond the scope of the Counseling Service, your counselor can provide a referral to off-campus resources.

Getting help between sessions

Crisis and Urgent Assistance

The Counseling Center is open during the academic year Monday through Friday, 9 AM to 5 PM. If you need to speak to your counselor before your next session, you can leave a phone message during these hours. If it is urgent, please let the front office staff know. If we cannot contact your counselor immediately, another counselor will be available to speak to you.

On-Call, After-Hours and Weekend Assistance

A Counselor-on-Call service provided through VCCS is available to students during the academic year, 24 hours a day, 7 days per week. The service we use is ProtoCall. This service is staffed by trained mental health counselors who are available to talk about general mental health concerns as well as urgent mental health needs. VCCS therapists provide back-up support to ProtoCall counselors in urgent and emergent situations.

The Counselor-on-Call may be contacted through the Campus Response Center (CRC) at 845-437-7333. When the CRC picks up, you only need to say that you want to talk to the Counselor-on-Call. You will be transferred to a ProtoCall counselor, who will listen to you and help problem-solve concerns. As noted above, a VCCS therapist may be alerted if your situation requires more emergent support than ProtoCall can provide.

All calls from Vassar students to ProtoCall are summarized and sent to VCCS counselors the following day to ensure that we can follow up with students for in-person support if needed.

Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

The Vassar College Counseling Services does not discriminate on the basis of age, gender identity, race, ethnicity, nationality, veteran status, religion, sexual or romantic orientation, or disability. Our focus is on the value and dignity of each student, and our dedication to facilitating a thriving campus community.

We hope that you have a helpful and positive experience at the Counseling Center. If you ever have any questions, concerns, complaints, or feedback of any kind, we invite you to speak to your counselor or to contact Wendy Freedman, Ph.D., Director 845.437.5700. You may also contact the Associate Dean of the College for Student Living and Wellness, Luis Inoa, at 845.437.5315.

Please sign your name and today's date in the space provided below to indicate that you have read the Client Information and Informed Consent for Services in its entirety and understand its contents.

Name

Date