

## 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 particular concerns that the client brings. There are a number of different 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.

#### First Appointment.

Your first scheduled visit to the Counseling Service is considered a “Consultation”, and it generally last from 20 to 50 minutes. You will meet with a counselor to discuss your concerns, and you and your counselor 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, he or she will make a referral to an appropriate resource in the community.

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.

#### Subsequent Appointments.

Counseling sessions are scheduled as available, sometimes weekly or biweekly, and may last 45-50 minutes, though you and your counselor may decide that it is appropriate to meet more or less often. Generally, psychotherapy at the Counseling Service is relatively short-term, proceeding on the basis of weeks rather than years.

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. Subsequent appointments will be offered as available, according to the treatment plan arrived at between therapist and client. Depending upon demand, it is possible that there will be waiting periods before clients can be seen in successive sessions.

It is important for you to arrive to your appointments on time, and call ahead, preferably 24 hours in advance, if you cannot attend a session. 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. Also, 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 have to 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.

## Confidentiality and Professional Records

The ethical codes of the American Psychological Association and the laws of New York guide the policies of Vassar College Counseling Service. This means that 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, or if you are unable to exercise good judgment. The exceptions to the rule of confidentiality are the following:

1. If appropriate, your counselor may consult with your treating physician or other healthcare provider at Vassar College Health Services or with the Eating Disorder Response Team to coordinate your care.
2. If you are clearly likely to do physical harm to yourself in the near future, it is your counselor's duty to keep you safe. Your counselor, or the director, will communicate with the Student of Concern Team to express concern about your safety. This step would be taken only if absolutely necessary.
3. If you are clearly likely to do physical harm to another person in the near future, it is your counselor's duty to warn the person involved. Your counselor, or the director, will communicate with the Student of Concern Team to express concern about harm to others. This step would be taken only if absolutely necessary.
4. If you share information about the abuse or neglect of any juvenile or disabled adult(s), your counselor may be required by state law to report that information to the Department of Social Services.
5. If you are seventeen or younger, your parents may have legal access to your counseling records.
6. If ordered by a judge to testify or provide counseling records as part of a judicial proceeding, your counselor would be required to comply. Such a situation may arise in child custody proceedings or in proceedings in which your emotional condition is an important element.
7. The VCCS must abide by the NY SAFE Act that allows law enforcement to restrict access to fire arms. Please go to: [http://www.omh.ny.gov/omhweb/safe\\_act/nysafe.pdf](http://www.omh.ny.gov/omhweb/safe_act/nysafe.pdf) for more information.
8. The VCCS must abide by the NY INTERNET SYSTEM FOR TRACKING OVER-PRESCRIBING (I-STOP) ACT which regulates prescriptions for controlled substances. Please go to: [http://www.acog.org/About%20ACOG/ACOG%20Districts/District%20II/~/\\_media/Districts/District%20II/PDFs/I\\_Stop\\_Law\\_MSSNY\\_Memo.pdf](http://www.acog.org/About%20ACOG/ACOG%20Districts/District%20II/~/_media/Districts/District%20II/PDFs/I_Stop_Law_MSSNY_Memo.pdf) for more information.

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 from senior staff 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.

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.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding confidentiality, please feel free to discuss them with your counselor.

## 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. Generally, students who consult with the psychiatrist will be limited to four visits per academic year.

The Consulting Psychiatrist provides psychiatric consultation, evaluation for psychotropic medications, and monitoring of medications prescribed. The Counseling Service does not provide emergency psychiatric evaluations, emergency prescription services, or evaluation for disability accommodations.

Should you need services not available at Metcalf, your counselor can provide a referral to off-campus resources. Emergency psychiatric services are available 24 hours/day at Saint Francis Hospital, Emergency Services, 845.431.8892.

## Getting help between sessions

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 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.

After hours and on weekends a counselor is on-call to respond to urgent calls. The counselor on-call may be contacted through the Campus Response Center (CRC) at 845.437.7333. The dispatcher will contact an on-call counselor who will return your call. Callers utilizing the CRC should note that such calls are routinely logged as part of the CRC's emergency services and are, thus, inherently not private to the same degree as calls placed directly to the Counseling Service.

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

## Ethics code and guidelines

The Vassar College Counseling Services does not discriminate on the basis of age, gender, race or ethnicity, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, or ability/disability.

The staff of the Counseling Center pledges to uphold legal and ethical codes and institutional requirements. 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., Interim Director of Psychological Services, at 845.437.5700. You may also contact the Dean of Students, DB Brown, at 845.437.5315.

To indicate that you have read the Client Information and Informed Consent for Services in its entirety, that you understand the criteria for eligibility of service, the limitations of services, the exceptions to confidentiality, and that you are aware that you can address any questions you may have to your counselor, please sign your name and today's date in the space provided below.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Name

Date