

Informed Consent for Counseling Bowdoin College Counseling Service

Welcome to the Bowdoin College Counseling Service! In order to serve you better, we would like to provide you with important information regarding your treatment. If you have questions or concerns, please discuss these with your counselor.

General Information

Services provided by the Counseling Service for both counseling and psychiatric consultations are offered free of charge to all currently registered Bowdoin students. The Counseling Service hours of operation are Monday through Friday, 8:30 am to 5:00 pm. Our website contains more detailed information about our services and philosophy, as well as a variety of self-help materials and online screening for specific concerns such as eating disorders, depression, and alcohol abuse. The Counseling Service web address is www.bowdoin.edu/counseling.

Emergency Information

Should an emergency arise, and you need to contact a counselor during non-business hours, you may call Campus Security at 725-3500 and request to speak with the Counselor-on-Call. Calls to Security are recorded and logged, but you do not need to identify yourself when requesting to speak to the Counselor-on-Call.

Your First Appointment

During your first visit, you will spend time with a counselor discussing your immediate concerns. This will help both you and your counselor decide how the Counseling Service can best help you. These services may consist of individual counseling, group counseling, psycho-educational classes, and/or an appointment with a consulting psychiatrist at the Counseling Service. In some instances, you may be referred to an off-campus service for longer-term, intensive therapy or some other mental health expertise not offered through the Counseling Service.

Additional Appointments

If it is mutually decided that additional individual sessions at the Counseling Service are needed, you will be assigned to one of the staff counselors for this purpose. This counselor may or may not be the same person you saw during your initial appointment. Counseling sessions are scheduled for a maximum of 50 minutes. You have the right to request a change to a different counselor if you so desire. During an early visit with your counselor, you will decide the goals of your work and the approximate length of the counseling contract. Because of the large number of students requesting counseling, the Counseling Service generally provides short-term therapy.

Cancellations and Not Showing-Up for an Appointment

A personal commitment is crucial to the success of counseling. Please keep all of your scheduled appointments. If you need to cancel, do so as far in advance as possible. If you “no-show” for an appointment, and do not call within 48 hours to reschedule, your appointment time may be assigned to another student. A series of missed appointments may necessitate referral to an off-campus provider. **(Over)**

Staff and Qualifications

The Counseling Service staff is composed of licensed psychologists, social workers, professional counselors, and doctoral or masters' degree level interns in psychology and social work. In addition, there are two part-time consulting psychiatrists. All clinical staff is supervised by the Director of Counseling. Your counselor's professional license is displayed in his/her office. Please ask your counselor if you have any questions about her/his professional training and license.

Confidentiality and Records

The Counseling Service adheres to the statutes of the State of Maine and the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974, which require that all client information be held in confidence subject to certain exceptions. To provide effective service, and as consultation/supervision is a standard component of professional practice, your counselor may discuss your case with other Counseling Service staff (i.e. supervisors or colleagues). In order to ensure coordinated and safe treatment, we also enter the following information into your chart at the Bowdoin College Health Service: 1) the name of your counselor; 2) diagnosis or reason for treatment; 3) status of your current contact with the Counseling Service; 4) a record of any medication(s) prescribed by one of the Counseling Service's consulting psychiatrists; 5) other information as clinically appropriate. Information contained in your chart at the Bowdoin College Health Service is subject to strict state and federal confidentiality laws governing health care providers. Except in circumstances described below, no one outside of the Counseling Service or Health Service will be given any information (even the fact that you have had contact with the Counseling Service) without your consent; parents, professors, other students, or college administrators may not have access to information about your Counseling or Health Services visits without your written permission.

A counselor's notes and any other written information regarding your contact with the Counseling Service never become part of your college record and are accessible only by Counseling Service staff. Counseling files are maintained at 32 College Street for ten years after the student's graduation and then destroyed. With your written authorization, counseling information can be disclosed to a third party for the specific purpose stated in your authorization. However, there are certain circumstances where the Counseling Service has the right to deny your request.

You may request to review your counseling records by filing a written authorization with the Director of Counseling Services. Your request must be responded to within a reasonable period of time. If the Director and your counselor believe that review of these records would be detrimental to your health or well-being, the Counseling Service reserves the right to require that a member of the Counseling Service staff be present while you review the file in order to discuss or help interpret information contained in the file.

Exceptions to Confidentiality

There are certain circumstances in which legal statutes require or allow mental health professionals to break confidentiality, without consent if necessary. These include circumstances where there is serious danger to self or others, or suspicion of child or elder abuse. Also, in rare instances, counseling records may be subject to court subpoena. In the event of after-hours emergency services, information may also be shared with necessary campus personnel (i.e. Security, Dean of Students, and Residential Life) to provide safety and support. If you have any questions or concerns about these exceptions, please ask your counselor for further information.

Collaborative Treatment with the Health Center For Eating Disorders and Chemical Dependency

Counseling Services collaborates with the Health Center to ensure that eating disorders and chemical dependency concerns are treated as effectively and beneficially as possible. Severe eating disorders can trigger serious medical consequences requiring both psychological and medical interventions. Consequently, there is a need for close collaboration between Counseling Services and the Health Center. Toward this end, an eating disorder treatment team exists at Bowdoin College to provide consultation and support to students. The team consists of a nurse, physician's assistant, nutritionist, psychiatrist, and two Counseling Service clinicians. Counseling Services also collaborates with the Health Center when a student struggling with chemical dependency might need to monitor their recovery with random drug screens. With both eating disorders and substance abuse issues, all information is kept strictly confidential and is not shared with any other person or office of the College without permission from the client, unless there is a serious danger to self or others.

Electronic Mail Communications

Students should be aware that confidentiality of electronic mail (e-mail) transmission cannot be guaranteed. For this reason, the Counseling Service discourages the sharing of compromising personal or clinical information through this medium. In addition, students should be aware that Counseling Service staff may not always have immediate access to nor monitor their email communications on a daily basis.

Risks and Benefits of Counseling

There are risks and benefits associated with counseling. Counseling may involve the risk of remembering unpleasant events and may arouse strong feelings. Benefits of counseling typically include symptom relief, an enhanced sense of well-being, and increased ability to cope with peer and family relationships and academic pressures. You may also gain a better understanding of yourself which will assist in your personal development.

Mutual Respect

Counseling is based on an underlying principle of deep respect for each student who comes for help. The Counseling Service is committed to this principle and expects students in turn to behave in a respectful manner with clinical staff and the administrative assistant. Verbal abuse may trigger termination of services with a referral to the Dean of Students for follow-up. No form of physical violence will be tolerated.

Feedback from You

Counseling Services is interested in your feedback. Toward this end, we will ask you in the course of the year to provide us with feedback through an evaluation form. All comments will be anonymous. In addition, should you have an immediate complaint, please request a Complaint Form from the receptionist. You can also give immediate feedback to the Director of Counseling Services, Dr. Bernie Hershberger, at 725-3069 or bhershbe@bowdoin.edu.