

# **FAQ AND ANSWERS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS ABOUT COUNSELING**

## **What is counseling?**

In many countries and cultures, counseling can occur in any relationship where two or more people work together towards understanding and resolving a problem or difficulty. For example, you may have called up your close friends to vent your upsetting feelings or stressful events you experienced. Or you might have turned to your parents or siblings for advice or support.

In the United States, international students often have lost immediate access to their primary support system, as they physically moved away from their primary supports. In addition, international students may experience increasing stress due to homesickness or to adjusting to the college environment, language and cultural difference in the U.S. These factors make international students more susceptible to academic, health, emotional, or psychological problems, or these factors may make a preexisting condition worse.

In counseling, a professional can function as your support in a way that is different from your family and friends. A counselor helps students to discuss their concerns in a safe and friendly environment. A counselor works with students to find the best way to help. For instance, if students are concerned about academic issues, a counselor will help students to work out their difficulties in school. If students feel sad and depressed about a break up, a counselor will provide a safe place for students to express their feelings without needing to worry about being judged. Also, often counselors will help students learn constructive ways of coping with stress, negative feelings, and challenges.

## **What kinds of issues can I talk about?/Is my problem appropriate for counseling?**

There is no such thing as right/appropriate or wrong/inappropriate issues that can be presented in counseling. In other words, any problem can be addressed. Just in case you are still uncertain about whether counseling is the right place for you, here are the most common examples of what Tufts students address in counseling:

- ✓ Stress management (e.g., “I feel stressed out” or “I feel my muscles are tensed”)
- ✓ Relationship concerns (e.g., “I just broke up with my boyfriend/girlfriend/or partner, and I feel sad, upset, and lonely”)
- ✓ Homesickness and loneliness (e.g., “I miss my family and I feel lonely and isolated”)
- ✓ Academic pressures (e.g., “I have difficulty concentrating on my studies” or “I am extremely worried that I will disappoint my parents”)
- ✓ Career (e.g., “I am not sure what I want to major in” or “I am concerned about getting a job after graduation”)
- ✓ Language and cultural differences (e.g., “I am concerned about speaking in a class” or “I feel like people are misunderstanding me (because of my difference)”)
- ✓ Anxious feelings (e.g., “I feel anxious about taking a test” or “I feel anxious about speaking to others”)
- ✓ Depressed mood (e.g., “I have lost motivation, interest, or pleasure in activities,” or “I sleep a lot and I don’t want to hang out with friends”)
- ✓ Physical illness (e.g., “I experience headache/stomachache/fatigue/chest pain/dizziness, but the doctor said that there is nothing wrong with me”)
- ✓ Sleeping difficulty (e.g., “I sleep a lot,” “I have difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep,” or “I don’t feel rested after sleeping”).
- ✓ Eating concerns (e.g., “I eat a lot when I feel stressed out” or “I am very concerned about my weight”)
- ✓ And a lot more...

## **What is the difference between Health Services and Counseling and Mental Health Services?**

A lot of students go to Health Services when they are physically sick or not feeling well. The professional staff at Health Services includes physicians, nurse practitioners, physician assistants, and medical assistants. This team provides care for students’ physical health. Sometimes, students’ physical health is related to their emotional and psychological state. Then, it could be more helpful to seek a professional counselor. For instance, a lot of students go to Health Services and seek medication for sleep difficulties. However, sleep difficulties could be related to anxiety, depression, or other situational and relational stressors. If this is the case, it could be helpful to address these psychological factors with a professional counselor. If you are not sure where to go for help, it is okay to visit either place. Health Services and Counseling and Mental Health Services work collaboratively as an interdisciplinary team. A professional staff person will help link you to the appropriate service and treatment team.

**Isn't counseling for "crazy" people?**

Not at all. In many cultures and countries, counseling may be viewed as a resource for only a small proportion of people experiencing significant mental health problems. However, counseling is more broadly used these days and is appropriate for all populations and for a wide range of concerns. Everyone has difficult life experiences sometimes. When these difficulties interfere with how you are feeling or your ability to function, then it is okay to need help or support from others. What matters is that you feel better. It's also worth noting that each year, over 1200 Tufts students come to our Counseling and Mental Health Service for professional help.

**Is seeking counseling a sign of weakness?**

Actually, asking for help when you need it demonstrates great strength. Sometimes students feel they should be able to resolve their problems on their own, but none of us can solve all of our problems alone all the time. Letting another person help you help yourself is also an indication of strength. It takes a lot of courage to face your problems. Once you have decided to get help, you have already taken a big step toward positive change.

**Can my friends and my family find out I am in counseling?**

No. Participation in counseling is private and confidential. No one can find out about your information or whether you receive counseling unless you provide consent. This means that if you want us to release information to someone specific such as an academic dean or family member, we cannot do so until you complete a Release of Information Form. Counselors handle confidential material very carefully. The only exception for confidentiality is if there is a risk to your safety or others' safety.

Your counselor will explain confidentiality and exceptions to the confidentiality in the beginning of your first meeting. Please feel free to ask more questions if you are still concerned.

**How much does it cost to see a counselor at Tufts?**

Counseling is free of charge to undergraduate students and to graduate students who have paid the Health Fee.

**I want to apply for a government job in the U.S. Can the U.S. government find out that I was in counseling, and will this hurt my chances of getting a job in the U.S.?**

Tufts University Counseling and Mental Health Service is bound by ethical, professional and legal guidelines, which prohibit the release of any counseling information without your permission. No employer can get access to your counseling records without your written consent. Also, we have seen numerous students in counseling who later successfully applied for and obtained US government jobs.

**I am not fluent in English. Will my counselor understand me?**

If English is not your native language, having to communicate in English can be stressful at times. Also, you might wonder whether your counselor understands you properly when you are struggling to express yourself in a foreign language. It is important to note that your counselor will not judge you and will want to work together to improve communication in counseling.

**Can I receive counseling in my native language?**

Tufts University Counseling and Mental Health Service is committed to embracing diversity and providing culturally sensitive services. If you feel more comfortable expressing your concerns in your native language, the following languages are spoken at CMHS:

- Korean
- Spanish

We also make referrals off campus, where more foreign languages are spoken.

**If you want to schedule an appointment or if you have any further questions, please feel free to visit or contact us**

Counseling and Mental Health Service  
Tufts University  
120 Curtis Street  
Medford, MA 02155

Phone (617) 627-3360  
You can request to speak to Euna Oh or any counselor  
Email at Euna Oh at [euna.oh@tufts.edu](mailto:euna.oh@tufts.edu)