

COUNSELLING SERVICE CONFIDENTIALITY & PRIVACY POLICY

Introduction

The Counselling Service at Maynooth University is a professional and confidential service. It adheres to a strict code of ethics and ethical practice as outlined by PCHEI (Psychological Counsellors in Higher Education in Ireland) and other professional bodies that counsellors are associated with.

Service Agreement

This policy outlines the principles of confidentiality as they apply to the Counselling Service, the terms and conditions of attending the Service and our privacy policy. Please read and sign the policy before engaging with the Service. Any queries arising can be discussed with a staff member.

Principles of Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a central and integral part of the counselling process. This means that what you disclose to us in confidence will not be shared with others without your explicit written permission. This in turn offers safety and privacy to you to discuss personal and private concerns. Information, written or verbal, given to the Service will be held in the strictest confidence as will all information about your engagement with our Service. On occasion and in exceptional circumstances counsellors may be professionally obliged to break confidentiality.

Limits to Confidentiality

Circumstances that may necessitate the disclosure of your personal information without your consent occur when:

1. There is a strong belief or evidence that a serious risk or danger exists for you or another individual. This may relate to issues surrounding sexual /physical /emotional abuse; rape; self-harm; suicidal intent; violence or criminal activity.
2. Counsellors working in the Counselling Service are mandated by law and obliged to report any disclosures of child sexual abuse, assault, ill-treatment or neglect of children to the Child & Family Agency TULSA under the reporting responsibilities of the Children First Guidelines (2015) and the University's policy on Child Protection [2017](#).
3. There is a formal legal requirement to share information as part of a statutory duty, legal process or a court order.

In these instances, information may be disclosed to significant others or appropriate third parties *without* your permission being sought. Where possible a full explanation will be given to you regarding the necessary procedures and intended actions that need to be taken.

Sharing of Information

On occasion it is beneficial to share information with an internal service/department or an external agency for the purpose of sharing relevant information pertaining to your well-being or as part of a mitigating circumstance.

Apart from the exceptions previously mentioned, sharing of information is always conducted in collaboration with you. A signed consent form must be completed prior to any information being shared or passed on. Written permission involves signing the Service consent form which includes your name and student ID, the defined purpose for the release of information, a named person to whom the information is directed to, and relevant dates of attendance.

Referrals

If you have been referred to the Service by a third-party, confirmation of your attendance cannot be given to the referrer without your permission. If you do not attend the booked appointment and a level of risk is highlighted by the referral, the Service may inform the third party of your non-attendance as your safety may be in question.

Terms and Conditions of Attending the Counselling Service

Registration

The Counselling Service offers a professional counselling service, free of charge, to all registered students of the University. If you wish to avail of counselling, you are required to register with us by completing a Service Registration Form and Questionnaire prior to your first engagement.

Questionnaire

At each session you will be asked to complete a questionnaire called a Core 10 /34 which is designed to capture the level of distress experienced over the past week. The questions address subjective well-being; commonly experienced problems or symptoms; life and social functioning; and risk to self and others. The levels of severity (low, mild, moderate, severe) are calculated by the system and your responses to the questions will be discussed in session with your counsellor.

Consent

On registering with the Counselling Service, you are required to read and sign the Confidentiality Policy and agree to the terms and conditions of attending the Service as outlined.

You have the right to refuse consent. This right will be upheld and respected. The potential implications of the decision will be discussed. In some cases, it may be inadvisable to continue with counselling as giving consent is part of the counselling agreement with you. You are free to change your mind regarding consent at any given time irrespective of any initial decision taken.

Service Contact

Contact from the Counselling Service will be via your college email address and mobile number. Permission to send SMS messages is requested. A contact number for a next of kin /emergency contact person is requested, as is the name of your GP. Neither will be contacted without your permission / knowledge except as outlined above.

Counselling Service Records

Counselling Service records hold personal data provided by you on registering with the Service. All information provided, questionnaires completed, documentation received on your behalf, case notes and administrative notes as recorded by service staff will also be included on your record.

Paper files are stored in locked cabinets, electronic files held on secure, college approved drives and on the Counselling Service Database (CORE Net) which is an encrypted, password protected database. Access to records is limited to staff within the counselling service. For the purpose of continuity of care all counsellors you attend for counselling will have access to your case notes.

Records are held securely and confidentially within the Service for a maximum of eight years. Following this period records are removed and securely destroyed. Counselling service records are not attached to any academic record within the University.

Appointment Based Service

All contact with the Service is by appointment only. A Drop-In appointment will be offered initially and conducted as a phone consultation. Face to face appointments will be offered as appropriate during Covid-19 restrictions. Please read the [Safety](#) protocol for face to face sessions and the [Phone Consultation](#) protocol before attending your appointment.

Scheduling of Counselling Appointments

Every effort is made to facilitate your counselling appointment within a reasonable timeframe. Appointments are scheduled with the first available counsellor. Requests to attend specific counsellors may result in a longer wait for your appointment. Appointments are offered on a fortnightly basis unless otherwise deemed necessary. The Counselling Service is short-term in nature and cannot facilitate requests for long-term psychotherapy or block-book appointments.

Cancellation Policy

We seek a commitment on your part to attend your booked appointments. If you are unable to attend your scheduled appointment, please give at least 24 hours notice by calling Reception on 01-7083554 or use the Service [web facility](#) to cancel. We will endeavor to reschedule another appointment for you within a reasonable timeframe. If you do not attend (DNA) a scheduled appointment we will send a text inviting you to contact the Service. The onus is on you to contact us.

Service Evaluation

When counselling ends you will be asked to complete a Client Feedback Form. This is returned anonymously to the Service and no identifying information is asked for. It is used as part of ongoing monitoring and evaluation of our service provision. If you are dissatisfied with our service, please discuss this in the first instance with your counsellor or alternatively with the Head of Service.

Annual Reports

Annual reports drawn from data stored on CORE Net is done in an aggregate and anonymous way. The Counselling Service also contributes de-identified data to the national database of student counselling services. Your explicit consent to contribute your anonymous data for this purpose is explained [here](#).

Clinical Supervision

To ensure best practice in line with professional and ethical guidelines all counsellors employed in the Counselling Service attend regular supervision. The purpose of supervision is to assist counsellors to reflect on and receive guidance in relation to their professional work. Client confidentiality is strictly preserved during supervision.

Privacy Policy

Any personal data provided by you while availing of the Counselling Service will be processed fairly and lawfully. Personal data obtained by the Counselling Service is processed and retained only for the purposes that are directly connected with the provision of counselling services and related administrative purposes.

You have a right of access to the notes held in your record. If you wish to withdraw your consent for the Counselling Service to hold your personal data please contact the Head of Counselling Service and make a request to have your data removed and securely destroyed.

College Policies

Your personal data is held in accordance with the University General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR, 2018) the Data Protection Policy (2018). The Counselling Service Confidentiality & Privacy Policy is in keeping with these policies.

Your rights include:

- The right of access to the personal data that the University holds about you;
- The right to have your personal data rectified;
- The right to be forgotten (erasure);
- The right to restrict the processing of your personal data;

- The right to data portability.

Please see the University's Data Protection [Policies](#) for further information.

DATE: 5/10/2020