



**Middle Georgia**  
State University

## **Counseling Center Policies and Procedures**

### **Consultation Services**

The Counseling Center provides students, staff, faculty, and parents with consultation on situations where input from mental health professionals might be helpful. We also offer faculty and staff consultation focused on clarifying personal, family, and work-related concerns and identifying treatment and other resources in the community.

### **Services Offered**

Individual and group counseling  
Career counseling  
Psycho-educational workshops and seminars  
Crisis intervention and consultation Assessment  
and referral services  
Self-help books, pamphlets, and handouts

### **Eligibility for Services and Guidelines for Off-Campus Referrals**

The Middle Georgia State University Counseling Center provides individual counseling and psychotherapy utilizing a short-term, problem oriented, solution-focused model. This will generally mean a maximum of 8 to 10 sessions. As a group, traditional aged college students tend to seek services when in crisis and have presenting problems that lend themselves to a short-term model. The following guidelines are provided for those situations in which a student's needs are not likely to be met by a short-term model of treatment.

1. Students must be enrolled in at least four (4) academic hours in order to utilize resources of the Counseling Center.
2. Students with psychiatric disabilities such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia and recurrent serious depression should receive their psychiatric follow-up and psychotherapy off campus since these conditions require long-term follow-up. The Counseling Center will offer academic case management. Support may be offered focused on coping with the demands of the student role and recovery from serious psychiatric illness.
3. Students needing treatment for alcoholism or drug addiction will be referred to programs off campus. AA meetings sites are provided for students who are just beginning the process of recovery to supplement their off-campus treatment.
4. Students diagnosed with anorexia must have a primary treatment provider in the community and a written treatment contract with that provider which spells out the role of the Counseling Center and authorizes close communication between the primary counselor, parents, student, and Counseling Center. Counseling Center services will be limited to supportive crisis intervention and assistance with issues related to academic performance and adjustment to college. Students who present in the Counseling Center with untreated and/or previously

undiagnosed anorexia will be informed that an outside evaluation must be obtained.

5. Students who identify themselves as seeking long-term therapy (who frequently mistakenly conclude this is covered by their tuition payments) should be referred to off-campus providers, with information about those who utilize a sliding scale fee. Students who have a history of utilizing long-term counseling/psychotherapy should be carefully advised as to the nature of services provided at Middle Georgia State University during the intake. This will assist the counselor and the client in deciding whether to pursue an off campus referral or to negotiate treatment plan for short-term work at the Counseling Center.
6. Students who complete a course of short-term counseling/therapy and as a result identify a need for longer-term work may be referred off campus for individual work or to a Counseling Center support group for additional assistance. Individual work with students with significant adjustment, family, or personal problems should probably be structured, in part, as preparation for additional work in a group format.

### **Informed Consent Policy**

Georgia's law requires that psychotherapists, during an initial session with a client, inform the client about confidentiality and exceptions to confidentiality contained in state statutes. All new clients are asked to review and sign a form entitled Counseling Services Informed Consent that explains services offered confidentiality and limits to confidentiality, and staff consultation. Occasionally a client will decline to sign the form. If the client verbally indicates an understanding of the material contained in the form and a desire to receive services, the counselor should document this in the progress notes along with the client's concerns about signing the form. The counselor may then proceed to work with the student, providing counseling and/or assessment and referral

### **Services to Faculty and Staff Policy**

Counseling Services is able to offer consultation to faculty and staff pertaining to problem resolution and goal-setting in the interest of the education of Middle Georgia State University students. However, MGA faculty and staff are eligible for single session crisis intervention and/or assessment and referral to community resources for personal or family issues. Consultation related to dealing with specific students or students in general is available to all staff and faculty.

#### **Procedure**

In the event that a faculty or staff member requests personal counseling services, a referral to will be provided.

### **Referral to Off-Campus Providers of Psychotherapy**

The Counseling Center maintains a list of area mental health professionals in private practice and area mental health clinics. Information regarding sliding scale fees is included when applicable. Referral to any of these professionals does not constitute an

endorsement and clients are counseled that they may have to shop around to find a therapist who is a good fit for them.

### **Off-Campus Referrals for Psychotropic Medication**

Students with psychotic illness and bipolar disorder will be referred to local mental health clinics or psychiatrists in private practice for medication management. Students with depression, ADHD, and anxiety disorders may be referred to their primary care physician or to a psychiatrist near their home for medication evaluation and management.

### **General Counseling**

Each individual is entitled to privacy in his/her work with a counselor. All contacts with a counselor are confidential to the Counseling Services professional staff. Written permission is required for Counseling Center to release information to others outside the Counseling Center. A court order may require an exception to the lawful protection of individual legal rights to privileged communication with a counselor or psychiatrist.

If it becomes clear in the counseling session that there is a real danger to one or to others, the Counseling Center is required to take action. Reports of abuse of children or others unable to care for themselves will also require some action to be taken. Confidentiality laws do not apply in these cases.

### **Equal Access to Services**

Students with counseling needs at MGA have the right to equal access to programs and services offered by the University Counseling Center as long they are enrolled in at least 4 credit hours during the semester in which they are seeking services. All clinicians will provide equal access to counseling services regardless of race, religious background, or sexual orientation, and will only refer to off campus resources based on level of care needed.

### **Records Management**

A record is kept of an individual's work with the Counseling Center. It contains information individuals have provided in writing as well as counseling notes of individual sessions. The record remains in Counseling Center for a period of seven years following an individual's last visit. After this time, the entire file is destroyed. **Counseling Center files never become a part of the permanent Middle Georgia State University's educational record.** If a student has questions about confidentiality and privacy they are encouraged to talk with a counselor or professional staff member of the Counseling Center.

### **Group Counseling**

The problem-focused groups usually run from 4 to 6 sessions of 1 1/2 hours, have 6 to 15 members and center on a particular shared area of difficulty in a task-oriented manner. A mixture of structured exercises and group process are used. These groups are generally closed ones and do not add members once the group has started. Examples of problem-focused groups would be assertiveness, self-esteem, bereavement and loss, overcoming shyness.

Clients may be self-referred for groups or referred by a Counseling Center counselor.

Counselors need to make referrals to groups in a positive manner, emphasizing the unique benefits and potential for learning in group therapy, and avoiding any suggestion that group therapy is a second-class modality.

Staff members are expected to actively recruit for groups through advertisement, speaking to student groups/classes, requesting referrals from other Counseling Center staff, etc. A group note is written at the end of each session and a copy placed in the individual chart of any group member who has one.

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality may be our main product. Most students have access to caring listeners and even good advice in their natural support system. Students come to the Counseling Center to deal with things in a secure, confidential environment. Protecting the confidential nature of our setting and our services must be a top priority.

This means counselors and professional staff members do not discuss cases in the halls or leave charts unattended. Counselors may divulge information only with the client's consent and only the minimum amount necessary. Counselors write progress notes in respectful tones and assume the notes may be read by the client and could become part of legal proceedings. Counselors set limits on inappropriate requests by administrators and parents for information. Counselors routinely advise clients of the legal limits to confidentiality. Further details on our confidentiality policy can be found in the Informed Consent document.

### **Release of Information Policy**

1. All communication between a client and a counselor, psychologist, or psychiatrist is confidential and will not, except under the circumstances explained below, be disclosed to anyone outside of Counseling Center unless written authorization to release information is given. A Release of Information Form will need to be signed to have a Counseling Center professional staff communicate information to anyone. A record is kept of a client's work with the Counseling Center. It contains information a client has provided to Counseling Center in writing as well as counseling notes from client sessions. The record remains in the Counseling Center for a period of seven years following the client's last visit; at that time, it is destroyed. **A client's record never leaves the Counseling Center and never becomes part of the client's educational record.**

2. Most limits to confidentiality are to ensure safety. If there is evidence of imminent danger of harm to the client or other(s), the Counseling Center must take action. If a client describes abuse of a child or elder, the information will be reported to the appropriate agency. It is possible a court order may require release of privileged communication.

3. Counseling information cannot be released to the following without the client's written consent:

- Parents or guardians, spouse, siblings, or significant other
- Doctor, lawyer, or health organization
- Insurance company, disability payment source, or state agency

#### **Procedure:**

1. A client may review his/her counseling record in the confines of the Counseling Center office with a counselor, and only by appointment

2. A client wishing to grant records access to another party must complete the Release of Information form.
3. There is no charge if records are released directly to another physician or health care facility, or another entity of Middle Georgia State University.
4. A summary of a client's counseling record may be prepared by a client's Counseling Center counselor. A summary is a written document created by a counselor based on the contents of the chart describing the counseling episode.
5. Records may be faxed or mailed. A cover sheet or letter must be affixed to accompany all documents.
6. The legal counsel of Middle Georgia State University may wish to review cases involving probable legal action before the information is released. In a legal case, the whole chart is copied at the written request of the legal counsel. Counseling Center will not release any medical information obtained from another clinic, hospital, or private physician if marked "not for secondary disclosure".
7. Counseling Center will not release records pertaining to alcohol/drug use, mental health, HIV/AIDS, abortion, and sexual assault unless the written consent is signed.
8. In cases of immediate transfer by ambulance or police of a client to any emergency facility or hospital, appropriate information can be sent with the client, including photocopies of clinical notes and identification information. This material should be provided for continuity of care. All attempts will be made to contact the emergency contact person(s) supplied by the client on his/her Client Intake Form or at the client's verbal request to contact such persons as so designated.
9. Pages of the chart with the stamp "re-disclosure is prohibited" may accompany records released by the records technician. The recipient of the information is then prohibited from using the information for other than the stated purpose and will prevent disclosure to a third party.

### **Tarasoff Warnings**

Under Georgia law, when a client makes what a counselor considers to be a legitimate threat toward a third party, the counselor must warn the identifiable potential victim, if there is one (there is no requirement to attempt to warn a whole class of people) and the nearest police department. A verbal warning should be made to the intended victim. The therapist should also fully document the warning to the intended victim in the client's case record. If the victim cannot be reached by phone or in person, a letter should be sent to the intended victim by registered mail, return receipt requested. If there is any question regarding the intended victim understanding or taking the threat seriously, a follow-up letter, return receipt requested is also suggested. The initial report to the police may be oral but should be followed by a written report, generated by either the police or the therapist.

## **Mandated Reporting Issues**

In Georgia, as in most states, all licensed mental health professionals are mandated to report abuse and neglect of children under age 18, abuse and exploitation of disabled persons, and abuse and exploitation of persons over the age of 60. Counselors can call the appropriate agencies and describe a questionable situation and be advised as to whether it needs to be reported.

## **Student Complaint/Grievance Policy**

**A.** Student complaints are handled largely through the existing chain of command. Given the existing laws regarding confidentiality and psychological/health services, a counselor/health service provider is restricted in terms of what he or she can disclose. If a student has a complaint about an employee or consultant of the Counseling Center, he or she is directed to speak with that employee's director, or if necessary, the immediate supervisor of the employee. The complaint should initially be logged informally by speaking with someone in the department. However, the complaint can be lodged more formally in writing first to the Director within five (5) working days of the incident. The written complaint or grievance should include a description of the incident, date, time, and persons involved in the complaint.

**B.** The director shall then respond to the grievance in writing within five (5) working days of the date that the grievance was signed and filed. If the student is not satisfied with the outcome of that discussion or response, he or she is directed to the next higher level of administration. In each case, careful consideration is given to the emotional stress the student may already be in as well as any complications arising from a possible mental or physical illness.

## **Alcohol and Drug Policy**

This information is being provided to all MGA students and employees as mandated by the Drug-Free Schools and Communities Act of 1989. Information concerning applicable legal sanctions under state, local, and federal laws for the unlawful possession, use or distribution of illicit drugs and alcohol, health risks associated with the use of illicit drugs and the abuse of alcohol, and alcohol and drug prevention and treatment resources is provided.

For students, the "Middle Georgia State University Student Handbook" publication defines social misconduct to include: violations of University's policies and regulations, local ordinances, and state and federal laws which include, without limitation, the manufacture, sale, or distribution, and/or unauthorized possession and use of controlled substances or alcohol. Violation of the above regulations will result in sanctions up to and including permanent separation from Middle Georgia State University. Employees are also expected to comply with all applicable laws.

Serious health risks are associated with the abuse of alcohol and the use of illicit drugs. There is a risk of overdose with all drugs. Overdose can cause coma, convulsions, psychosis, or death. Long term use of drugs can lead to organ damage, malnutrition, and mental problems. Certain combinations of drugs, such as alcohol and barbiturates,

can be lethal. Long term heavy alcohol use and binge drinking may result in respiratory arrest and death. Liver disease, heart disease, circulatory problems, peptic ulcers, some forms of cancer, and irreversible brain damage may increase with long term heavy drinking of alcohol. Employees can obtain information and referral services from the Office of Human Resources.

### **After Hours Counseling Emergencies**

After regular business hours, an answering machine advises callers to contact the Georgia Crisis & Access Line at 1-800-715-4225.

### **Crisis Assistance**

A crisis is defined as:

1. A person who has conveyed verbally or behaviorally that he/she is in crisis
2. A person who is disoriented and confused or lacks contact with reality
3. A person who disrupts university operations
4. A person who is in imminent danger of hurting him/herself or others

Procedure for voluntary crisis assistance:

Student will be assessed by Counseling Center Staff

Student will be asked for an appropriate contact person to come to campus and take the student to the ER for a medical evaluation

Staff will remain with student until their contact arrives

Staff will make an appointment with student for follow up

Procedure for non-voluntary crisis assistance:

Student will be assessed by the Counseling Center Staff

Staff will call Public Safety to escort emergency personnel to location

**Macon/Warner Robins: 471-2414      Cochran/Dublin/Eastman: 934-3002**

Immediate assistance may be rendered by Plant Operations as needed

**Macon/Warner Robins: 471-2780      Cochran/Dublin/Eastman: 934-3000**

Staff will call emergency contact for student as needed/requested Staff

will meet student at the ER if needed for continuity of care Staff will

initiate follow up call for appointment with student

**\*Under no circumstances shall a staff/faculty member transport a student in their personal vehicle.**