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# The University Counselling Service: General Information for Students

Every year over 2000 students contact us to request help and support during their time at Cambridge and we see over 10% of the student population. The University Counselling Service (UCS) offers a wide range of free, confidential help and support. Through providing psychological and therapeutic help, we aim to help you make the most of the educational and social opportunities that the University of Cambridge affords.

## **The Role Of The UCS**

Students make most personal decisions and solve many problems through discussions with friends or family, or with the support of college welfare staff. However, there are times when it is right to seek confidential and professional help in an environment which is both separate from those mentioned above, and yet where student life and the University are understood: the Counselling Service was set up in 1969 to meet such a need.

We are interested in supporting the whole person, in order that you will be better able to make the most of the academic, social and leisure opportunities that Cambridge University affords and offer a range of services for this purpose.

## **Who can be seen at the student counselling service?**

All registered undergraduates in residence and graduate students of Cambridge University who are members of a College may use the Service, including students at the Theological Colleges who have matriculated, and part-time students who are members of a College. If you are intermitting, please contact us and we will be able to suggest alternative sources of support.

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## **What kinds of problems can the UCS help with?**

Many personal, emotional and psychological problems can be helped through counselling or cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT). Talking treatments may not suit everyone, but many can benefit from discussing common problems such as anxiety, stress and depression, family and/or relationship difficulties, bereavement and loss, sexual problems or identity issues. Counselling can also help with more specific problems such as adjusting to a new culture, social anxiety, perfectionism, loneliness, low self-esteem, trauma, harmful or risky behaviours, and difficulties with food, drugs or alcohol.

We prefer to see students before matters become serious so don't put off coming because you think it would be wasting our time. Seeking help to address difficulties is a strength and a pro-active way of addressing your concerns.

## **What support is available at the UCS?**

When you contact our Service, we will assess your needs and offer the most appropriate source of support available at the time. This might range from using selected self-help resources, accessing a mindfulness course, coming to one of our workshops or groups, or attending a consultation with a counsellor, CBT therapist, Mental Health Advisor or Sexual Assault & Harassment Advisor.

### *Self-help information*

The UCS website has carefully selected information on a range of problems that are common to students with suggestions on self-help information including books and online resources, together with an extensive collection of in-house leaflets on topics particularly relevant to students. They also give guidance about when to seek further help, with suggestions of where this might be found. Copies of the leaflets are also available from the Counselling Service and you may find copies in your College or department.

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## *Mindfulness@Cam*

Mindfulness often proves helpful to students, supporting wellbeing and ability to study. Students affiliated to a Cambridge University College can learn mindfulness by attending our mindfulness classes. Links to enable you to book onto the classes are circulated every term by Senior Tutors. More information can be found on our website: [www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/welfare-and-wellbeing/mindfulness-cam](http://www.cambridgestudents.cam.ac.uk/welfare-and-wellbeing/mindfulness-cam)

## *Individual counselling at UCS*

All the permanent staff at the UCS are qualified, experienced and accredited counsellors, psychotherapists or cognitive behavioural therapists. Most of our work comprises individual short-term focused counselling and CBT and for some students only one or two sessions may be needed. The combined experience within our team means we are usually able to offer the most appropriate form of help and, if not, we can advise on possible referral options when specialist input or longer-term therapy is needed.

## *College-based counselling*

In addition to the centralised UCS, College-based Counselling is provided in Colleges taking part in this scheme, which currently includes: Downing, Girton, Lucy Cavendish, Magdalene, Peterhouse and Wolfson (please check our website for up-to-date information about the participating Colleges). College-based counsellors are part of the wider UCS and governed by the same confidentiality policies, procedures and professional standards. Other Colleges may also have independent counselling available as part of their welfare provision.

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## *Groups and workshops*

We offer several groups throughout the year including counselling groups for undergraduate and postgraduate students, and for students who have experienced the loss of a parent or carer. Each term we offer several short-term focused groups, running over 4-5 weeks, on topics such as managing low mood, self-esteem, perfectionism, assertiveness, and self-compassion, together with a wide range of individual workshops ranging from improving the relationship with your supervisor to exam preparation. You can find more information about each term's programme on our website: [www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/studentcouns/studentgroups](http://www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/studentcouns/studentgroups)

## *Mental Health Advisors*

Mental Health Advisors (MHAs) offer a range of interventions to students who are in crisis or who are experiencing moderate to severe mental health difficulties. They can provide mental health assessments, fitness to study assessment, ongoing support, liaison with tutors and academic departments, as well as GPs and mental health services.

Students are not able to refer themselves to the MHAs. Referrals may be made by College or some University staff, GPs or mental health services.

## *Sexual Assault & Harassment Advisor*

The Sexual Assault & Harassment Advisor (SAHA) is able to provide emotional and practical support to anyone who has been raped, sexually assaulted, or harassed, whether recently or in the past. They are able to help you explore reporting options and can support you through the process itself, if you decide to report an incident. Help can also be provided to access other available support services.

If you are unsure whether something that has happened might be sexual assault or harassment, you are welcome to access the service to explore this with the SAHA.

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You can arrange an appointment to meet with the SAHA by completing a pre-SAHA form: <https://forms.counselling.cam.ac.uk/titanium/wcmenu.aspx> or can contact the SAHA by email: [sexual.assault.advisor@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:sexual.assault.advisor@admin.cam.ac.uk)

## **How do I make a counselling appointment?**

Visit our secure website [www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/studentcouns/students](http://www.counselling.cam.ac.uk/studentcouns/students) and complete a pre-counselling form. These forms are read every working day and enable us to arrange counselling with an appropriate member of our team, either at UCS or your College, if is taking part in the College-based counselling scheme. When we have received your form, you will get an email acknowledgement and will be offered an appointment in due course, subject to your availability. We always take the urgency of the situation into account in allocating appointments.

At certain times of year, demand on the Service is high, so the more availability you can offer the earlier an appointment may be made.

## **What if I need more help than the UCS can provide?**

If longer-term work is indicated or the Service doesn't have the resources available to meet your needs, we will provide information on what external resources might be available. In some cases, referral to psychological, therapeutic or psychiatric services in the community may be the most appropriate option.

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## **How long will I have to wait for a counselling appointment?**

Waiting times vary throughout the year depending on the demand on the Service, your availability and any factors that indicate the need to prioritise an appointment. Longer waiting times can occur if you do not confirm appointments, repeatedly decline and/or cancel appointments, or have very limited availability. We ask that you prioritise attending UCS appointments as you would a GP appointment.

You can find current waiting time information on our website.

## **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is a crucial aspect of counselling. Information about you will not be shared outside the Service unless you give us your explicit consent to disclose this information. However, confidentiality may be extended without consent where there are serious grounds for concern about your safety or the wellbeing of others, or for legal requirements.

If you see a MHA, at the first appointment you will be asked for your written consent for information to be shared on a 'need to know' basis. If you choose not to give your consent, support will be limited.

## **How can I join a group?**

If you are seeing a counsellor they are able to register your interest in attending a group. Alternatively, you can ring or email UCS Reception and a note will be made of your interest. Before joining a group we would usually arrange a brief meeting between you and the relevant group facilitator so that you can discuss the group in more detail and consider how helpful it would be before making a commitment to join. You will need to ensure that you allow enough time for this to be arranged otherwise you may have to wait until another occasion to join the group.

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Please be aware that we do not arrange for individual counselling and group work at the same time and only one group or course can be attended at a time.

## **How can I join a workshop?**

Ring UCS Reception (Tel: 01223 332865) or email [counsellingreception@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:counsellingreception@admin.cam.ac.uk) to book a place.

Workshops can be attended alongside individual counselling or group sessions.

## **What to do in an emergency**

The Counselling Service is not an emergency service. Many Colleges operate a tutorial system with a tutor on call or have Porters' Lodges that are staffed 24 hours a day who you are able to contact. You might also contact your GP, Samaritans (Tel: 116 123), NHS First Response (Tel: 111 and select option 2), the emergency services, or the A&E Department at Addenbrooke's (Tel: 01223 217118).

In an emergency, counselling is not going to be the first support needed but may be appropriate once the immediate crisis has been resolved.

## **UCS website**

The UCS website ([www.counselling.cam.ac.uk](http://www.counselling.cam.ac.uk)) contains general information about the Service, and also includes copies of all our leaflets, carefully selected self-help information as well as links to other counselling-related agencies in the Cambridge area.

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## Contacting UCS

The Counselling Service is open throughout the year except for closures at Christmas and the Easter weekend. Opening times are:

Monday	9.00 a.m. – 5.30 p.m.
Tuesday	9.00 a.m. – 7.30 p.m.
Wednesday	9.00 a.m. – 5.30 p.m.
Thursday	9.00 a.m. – 7.30 p.m.
Friday	9.00 a.m. – 5.00 p.m.

## Contact details

Telephone: 01223 332865

Email: [counsellingreception@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:counsellingreception@admin.cam.ac.uk)

Website: [www.counselling.cam.ac.uk](http://www.counselling.cam.ac.uk)

Tel: 01223 332865  
Fax: 01223 760990  
Email: [counsellingreception@admin.cam.ac.uk](mailto:counsellingreception@admin.cam.ac.uk)  
Web: <http://www.counselling.cam.ac.uk>