Who goes to see a counselor?

The vast majority of those who see a counselor are ordinary students who have encountered challenges that result in distress or reduced functioning. Students consult a counselor when they are unhappy about the way their life is going.

Sometimes they feel stressed and overwhelmed by pressures and demands of school, work, family and peers.

Maybe they are depressed because painful losses, breakups, or other adversity have immobilized them.
Perhaps there is conflict in their relationships with family, friends, roommates or significant others, or they don't feel as connected to others as they would like.

Or maybe they are frustrated because they are performing below their abilities and they are not sure what to do about it.

Maybe they feel that habits or compulsions such as overeating, drinking, smoking, or drug use are getting in the way of their work, their relationships or functioning.

Sometimes they feel dread, fear or panic about anticipated events and want to learn ways of managing their anxiety.

Some may be concerned about their failure to make friends or connect with others and want to figure out what they can do about it.

Sometimes a student is torn about a major decision in their life, and is not sure what to do. In other cases, a person may know exactly what he wants out of life, but does not know how to go about getting it.

Many students feel “stuck”. They do not feel in control of things. Their difficulties are getting in the way of living their life the way they want to, and the solutions they have tried have not worked. Their challenges continue to interfere with their performance, functioning or peace of mind.

These kinds of things happen to just about everybody at one time or another. So what is different about a student who goes to see a counselor?

Students who go to see a counselor want to take charge of their life. They want to increase their control over the things that happen to them, and learn how to go about getting the things they want. They are students who want to move on in their lives, and so are taking action to remove the barriers in their way. Rather than suffer in silence and just "sit and take it" when things are not going well, they have the strength to take initiative in making use of professional resources so they are not at the mercy of things that make them unhappy.

But if I see a counselor, doesn't that mean there is something wrong with me or I am weak? Shouldn't I be able to handle my problems without help from somebody else?

Everyone runs into challenges in living. But not everybody does something about it. Taking advantage of available professional resources to increase your personal power is being smart, not weak. Consulting a counselor is no different than consulting a lawyer or doctor or plumber or library when you need to know something that will be of use to you.

What is your approach to helping students?

Our goal is to promote your well-being and help you realize your full potential. We try to help you to improve your functioning so you can succeed in attaining what you want out of life. We help you remove barriers and obstacles to your success. We help you reduce or eliminate conditions which compromise your functioning. We help you identify and implement your “recipe for success” (conditions which bring out the best in you), and we help you identify and remove conditions which bring out the worst in you (your “recipe for failure”). You learn how to structure your world to maximize your functioning and your outcomes, by providing the conditions in which you thrive, and by removing or navigating obstacles, triggers and temptations for trouble, thereby “rigging” your world so that things go well. You identify choices that lead to the outcomes you desire. We help you increase control over your world so that things go better for you.
The overwhelming majority of students who see us simply wish to improve the quality of their life and the results of their efforts. All students are welcome, and students often return when they encounter challenges that are difficult to navigate.

**Won't seeing a counselor make me dependent on them?**

Quite the opposite. It's true that consulting a plumber or lawyer or electrician rarely enables you to handle the next problem that arises without help. However, successful counseling increases your independence by giving you skills which help you to deal with future problems by yourself. The whole idea of seeing a counselor is to strengthen your own coping skills and functioning so that help will no longer be needed.

**What if I don't want someone to know I'm in counseling? Is there any chance that they could find out from my counselor?**

Counselors maintain the strictest confidentiality about whom they are seeing and what they talk about. Without their clients' written permission, they will never release information to anyone about who their clients are or what has gone on in counseling. Only if someone's life is being seriously threatened or a child is being abused is a counselor required by law to break this confidentiality.

**What goes on during counseling?**

A counselor and his/her client talk about the difficulties that brought them into counseling. Together they explore possible causes of the problem, and try to size up the obstacles that need to be overcome in order to achieve personal goals. During this time the counselor tries to understand the client and to help them understand themself and what they want. By examining their life together with an understanding and concerned person who gives them objective feedback, the client gets a clearer picture of themself and their life situation. They are then able to set goals for the kinds of continued changes they want to make. Then the client and counselor work together to bring about these changes.

The methods that a counselor may use to help a client bring about change vary widely. They will depend on what the problems are and the unique needs of the individual client. The counselor will try to tailor their methods so that they will be most beneficial to the particular person they are seeing. The counselor sometimes acts as a mirror, reflecting back to the client what they see so that the client can see themself more clearly. Sometimes the counselor acts as a coach, guiding the client in practicing new skills for coping with stress and solving problems, demonstrating new ways of relating to people that get more positive results, and giving the client feedback, encouragement and tips for further improvement. Sometimes they act as a consultant, providing expert information and professional opinions that the client can use.

Some students have the wrong impression that a counselor may somehow control a client or do things against their will. In fact, the opposite is true. The counselor's goal is always to increase the client's control by learning constructive ways of overcoming problems and getting the things they want. Everything the counselor does is designed to help the client move toward their own ultimate life goals.

The experience of counseling can often feel very satisfying, but also at times can be difficult. The focused attention, support and nonjudgmental acceptance of the counselor are very comforting and healing, and the process of self-discovery and taking control of your life can be exciting. However, counseling involves hard work and at times discomfort as you face certain painful realizations or difficult tasks required for growth.

**What will I get out of counseling?**

While this depends on the problems you work on in counseling, there are a number of common changes that take place. Typically, at the end of counseling clients feel better about themselves and their lives. They understand themselves better and understand others around them better. They experience less
friction with others, and have more harmony in their relationships. They often feel less anxious, angry, depressed or guilty. They have learned methods of reducing stress and solving problems when they arise. They have learned how to communicate so that others will listen and respond favorably. They have also learned how to conquer troublesome personal habits. Their ability to navigate challenges, obstacles and adversity and successfully meet the demands of academic life has improved. Overall, clients tend to feel more in charge of their life, and have taken constructive steps to get the things they want out of life.

It is important to realize that these things do not result automatically from seeing a counselor. They require motivation to change and work on the part of the client. While the counselor does whatever they can to make change easier, the amount of progress that is made depends on how much effort the client makes. Improvements do not "happen to" the client as if by magic; they are the result of changes that they themself must make.

How long does counseling take?

There is considerable variability in how long counseling takes, depending on the type of issues addressed. Some students feel their immediate needs are met in just a few sessions, while others choose to tackle goals that can take longer. The student in consultation with their counselor decides the goals and therefore the timeframe for their counseling.

We embrace a short-term approach to helping students get back on top of their game as quickly as possible. Students may always return for help in navigating challenges whenever they wish.

How much does counseling cost?

Counseling services at NMU are free for all enrolled students. No insurance or other coverage is required.

What benefits do students who have used our counseling services report?

99% of students rated counseling as helpful in feeling better about themselves and/or acting more effectively.
99% of students reported they would recommend counseling to a friend in need of help.

How do I go about getting help from the Counseling Center?

Stop by 3405 Hedgcock and complete the intake paperwork and set up an appointment. If you indicate that the matter is urgent, every effort will be made to see you as soon as possible.
Our Staff:

Marie Aho, Ph.D.
Acting Director, Licensed Clinical Psychologist

Mary Etchison, Ph.D.
Licensed Professional Counselor

Cathy Greer Cole, LMSW
Licensed Master Social Worker/ Counselor

Jean Kupper, LMSW
Licensed Clinical Social Worker/ Counselor

Christy Hartline, Ph.D.
Licensed Clinical Psychologist

Counseling and Consultation Services
Northern Michigan University
3405 Hedgcock
(906) 227-2980 office
(906) 227-1103 fax
Office Hours: Weekdays 8 AM – 5 PM
http://www.nmu.edu/counseling

SAME DAY EMERGENCY APPOINTMENTS AVAILABLE

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