



## **SOP – STUDENT COUNSELLOR**

(INDIVIDUAL, GROUP OR PARENTAL COUNSELLING)



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# **SOP 1: CONDUCT & PROCESS OF COUNSELLING**

## **Introduction:**

Counselling is a therapeutic space where students can feel safe to come forward and express their personal issues or mental health struggles. The Counselling sessions usually last for an hour and take place on a weekly basis, with prior appointments scheduled by the Counsellor, after clear communication of the same from the student. Students are free to approach the Counsellor out of their own need or through referral from a friend or faculty member.

Psychological Counselling encompasses 3 major areas of life, whereby a student can seek guidance, namely:

- Cognitive Functions or Learning Process Difficulties such as memory problems, poor concentration, inability to score good grades despite a lot of efforts, etc.
- Social Skills Deficits/ Social Circle Issues such as family discord, social anxiety, strained intimate relationships, difficulties in maintaining or forming friendships, etc.
- Personal Struggles or Psychological Disorders such as anxiety, panic attacks, anger management, depression, suicidal ideation/tendencies, substance dependency, loneliness, grief, dealing with trauma and so on.

## **Roles & Responsibilities of a Counsellor:**

- ❖ Active Listening to students' academic, emotional, social, and behavioral concerns in an open and non-judgmental manner and taking notes on the same.
- ❖ Working collaboratively with students to develop solutions and set achievable goals, thereby respecting their development into adulthood.
- ❖ Facilitating conflict mediation and resolution between students, students and teachers, or parents and faculty to ensure students' goals are achieved smoothly.
- ❖ Helping students to prepare themselves for the future any life-challenges that they may be apprehensive of.

- ❖ Providing psycho-educational sessions to parents during sessions to bridge the generation gap or to help understand the other's perspective for both the student and parent concerned.
- ❖ Offering referrals to external resources for mental health disorder screening, substance abuse, or psychological assessments.
- ❖ Reporting student issues to the appropriate state authorities if neglect/ abuse/ self-harm is suspected or observed.

### **Process of Counselling:**

The process of Counselling takes place mostly in three stages, as follows: Rapport Building, Identifying the Specific Problem Areas (not just the Presenting Concern/s) and Goal- Setting. In the first session the Counsellor does an intake of detailed information on the life & background of the student/parent through the Counselling Form. The student also briefed on what the process of Counselling is going to be like and about the realistic expectations they can maintain during the journey that they will embark on with the Counsellor.

The student is mentally prepared to be patient and kind with themselves during the process as there is no structured timeline in terms of reaching their goals and seeing the visible changes they desire in themselves. There is rarely a quick fix to issues, and in some cases they may need to get worse before they get better. The counseling process is collaborative, the counselor doesn't offer advice or quick solutions; the work requires interaction and commitment from both counsellor and student.

According to Hackney and Cormier (2005), Counselling takes place in five stages primarily and they are as follows:

1. *Rapport Building (Initial Disclosure)*: This stage is the foundation whereby the Counsellor establishes a comfort level with the student, to understand their background, their personality and to empathize with the student regarding their life and their struggles, regardless of the intensity of the

issue. The counselor focuses on using good listening skills and building a positive relationship.

2. *Problem Assessment (In-Depth Exploration)*: While the counselor and student build a beneficial, collaborative relationship, another process is underway, namely *problem assessment*. The counselor carefully listens and draws out information regarding the student's issues, their life, family environment and the reason they have engaged in counseling. Information crucial to subsequent stages of counseling includes identifying triggers, timing, environmental factors, stress levels, and other relevant factors.
3. *Goal Setting (Transformation in Progress)*: Effective counseling relies on setting appropriate and realistic goals, building on the previous stages. The goals must be identified and developed collaboratively, with the student committing to take small steps toward change, at their suitable pace - leading to a particular outcome.
4. *Intervention*: This stage varies depending on the counselor and the theories they utilize, as well as the situations the student is facing. For example, a *behavioral approach* may suggest engaging in activities designed to help them alter their behavior. In comparison, a *person-centered approach* seeks to engage the student's self-actualizing tendency.
5. *Evaluation, Termination or Referral*: Evaluation and termination of sessions may not be a stage but the art of ending the counselling process is crucial. A positive and smooth conclusion to the counselling process is essential to avoid anger, sadness or anxiety in the student-clients. Part of the process is to reach an early agreement on how the process comes to an end and what success looks like. This may require referral, if need be. The student is told that they can always come back again if they need counselling for any issues in the future.

## **Records Maintained & Specifics of Confidentiality:**

Records of Student Data for the Intake as well as every session are maintained under lock & key, with the Counsellor alone. Records of student data from the first (and sometimes second session) are stored in the Counselling Form. Thereafter, all information on each session is noted down in separate A4 sheets as process notes.

Confidentiality in counselling creates a space where the client can explore sensitive topics of their life, knowing well that the counsellor will not relay or misuse the information discussed outside of the counselling room. For the counsellor, maintaining confidentiality within certain limitations is an ethical responsibility. That's what makes counselling different from other relationships. Trust is an essential element that needs to be reassured to the client quite a few times across various sessions. This allows for deeper exploration of areas of experiencing which feel particularly difficult or shameful. The counsellor can also use self-closure to enhance the student's ease of discussing their personal issues.

### When to Break Confidentiality:

It must be noted that there are certain limitations to confidentiality in counselling, and there are situations where a counsellor may need to break confidentiality. A legal obligation or an organizational policy requirement would demand the same. It is important that the concerned student-clients are aware of the circumstances where confidentiality may be broken.

Listed below are the situations wherein confidentiality needs to be broken:

- ✚ If a client discloses involvement in, or information about acts of terrorism, the counsellor is legally obliged to inform the authorities, and cannot inform the client of their intention to do so.
- ✚ If a client gives the counsellor information regarding money laundering or drug-trafficking offences, he or she is obliged to pass this information to the police or to the Chief Proctor or any other higher official.

- ✚ *Risk of self-harm* – If a client is expressing suicidal thoughts or prior attempts of suicide or self-harm, the counsellor will have policies to follow regarding when and how confidentiality will be broken. It is important to report the same when required to the concerned officials in the organization so as to prevent any untoward incidents.
- ✚ *Risk of harm to others* – Although there is no legal obligation to report abuse of any form, safeguarding is an ethical responsibility, and in some cases, confidentiality will have to be broken. In circumstances where there may be an increased risk to a student or vulnerable person, they are unlikely to be informed that the counsellor intends to break confidentiality.

## **SOP 2: ETHICS OF COUNSELLING**

There are certain principles that every counsellor abides by in order to maintain a healthy Counselling relationship with any student and they are as follows:

- **Confidentiality** - *Counselors have an ethical responsibility to protect the privacy of their clients. Before the session begins, the counselor provides the student with written information that explains how the client's private information will be handled. They may ask the client to sign an Informed Consent Form that states they are aware of the counselor's confidentiality policy. Confidentiality has its exceptions, as mentioned in the previous section.*
- **Impartiality** – *Students come from every walk of life, and they belong to any one of the myriad religions, cultures, and backgrounds in India, for the vast majority. It's vital for a counsellor to be able to take people at face value and use the same professionalism regardless of which student. One is expected to leave their own issues at the door, as a Counsellor. Personal problems affect us all—but when your job involves dealing with and advising on the issues other people face, your own issues can introduce biases and prejudices, which one must be mindful of.*
- **Autonomy** - *This principle emphasizes the importance of choice, in a client's ability to be self-direct within therapy and all aspects of life. It addresses the responsibility of the counselor to encourage students, to make their own decisions and to act on their own values. There are two important considerations in encouraging student-clients to be autonomous. First, helping the client to understand how their decisions and their values may or may not be received within the context of their society. The second consideration is related to the client's ability to make sound and rational decisions. The principle of autonomy opposes the manipulation of clients against their will, even for beneficial social ends.*
- **Beneficence** – *This principle is based on acting in the best interest of the student (client). Beneficence reflects the counselor's responsibility to contribute to the welfare of the student. Simply put it means to do good, to be proactive and*



*also to prevent harm when possible (Acc. to Forester-Miller & Rubenstein, 1992). It directs attention to working strictly within one's limits of competence and providing services on the basis of adequate training/experience. An obligation to act in the best interests of a student may become paramount when working with those whose capacity for autonomy is diminished because of immaturity, lack of understanding, extreme distress, serious disturbance or other significant personal issues.*

- Non- Maleficence – *Non-maleficence is the concept of not causing harm to others. Often explained as "above all do no harm", this principle is considered by some to be the most critical of all the principles. It reflects both the idea of not inflicting intentional harm, and not engaging in actions that risk harming others. Non-maleficence involves avoiding sexual, financial, and emotional or any other form of client exploitation; avoiding malpractice; not providing services when unfit to do so due to illness or personal circumstances. The practitioner has an ethical responsibility to strive to mitigate any harm caused to a student even when the harm is unavoidable or unintended.*
- Neutrality of Opinion – *The counsellor may be aware or familiar with some students from a different context. During the course of a counselling session, though, the counsellor is expected to maintain a neutral and unbiased approach, especially in the setup of couples' or group therapy. Their evaluation of the situation and the issue must be neutral so as to be non-judgmental and to give students a fair and balanced experience of the counselling process.*
- Transference & Countertransference – *Transference occurs when the student projects attitudes or feelings towards the counsellor, while countertransference is the opposite – whereby the counsellor subconsciously projects feelings/ attitudes towards the student. Although countertransference could make way for more empathy towards the student, it could also lead the counsellor being like a parental figure/ in being overprotective. Additionally it could also lead to development of feelings of romance or sexual interest in the counselor towards the student and that can lead to major complications in the process of therapy. Hence, it is important to be aware of both/ either of these complications and address at the earliest, to see if a referral may be necessary as the next step.*

- Financial Boundaries – *Students are not expected to pay any fee for Counselling as the Counsellor at the University is a salaried employee. Hence, even if a client (student or parent) insists on paying for the session, then he is convinced not to make the payment at all costs. Furthermore, none of the students or parents are to give gifts to the Counsellor as a way to thank them. A Counsellor is also told not to accept any forms of gifts as it may lead to some form of transference or complexity in the dynamics of Counselling for the future.*
- Self- Respect – *This principle sheds light on the fact that a counsellor is human too and that he/she is also entitled to self-care and respect. Each student who is a client must realize that sometimes even a counsellor needs a break and that they also need to prioritize their mental or physical health, when necessary. It also implies that the counsellor communicates their boundaries very clearly, either verbally or non-verbally during the sessions.*

## **SOP 3: DISCIPLINE CASES - PROCESS**

Students would receive brief counselling in the context of any disciplinary issues. Primarily there are two types of cases with regards to indiscipline –

- 1) Inappropriate social conduct in the University (For example: PDA or bullying or even inappropriate touch, between students – usually of male and female genders)
- 2) Indulgence/ Carrying illegal substances in one's belongings. (For example: alcohol or drugs or sharp objects)

The process of Counselling is Stage 2 in most cases, wherein the accused students are called for a round of discussion and interrogation with the Chief Proctor as the first Stage. In some cases, where there are only girls involved in the case, then the Counsellor is called during first Stage as a matter of safety and gender-appropriate protocol. Thereafter, the counselling is done in individual counselling sessions, followed by couple or group counselling.

The students are required to write a letter of apology, submit an undertaking and in extreme cases the affidavit from the parents would also be essential to close the cases and take the appropriate decision for correcting the student's behaviour. Students are provided with a second chance after one record of offense, after which if they are found guilty of another act of indiscipline then they will be offered counselling but if not for parental intervention, then they will be expelled from the University.

Counselling would be offered to the students and in some cases to the respective parents as well, until the case is resolved. Reports would be prepared immediately on the counsellor's observations and recommendations, which would be handed over to the Chief Proctor, who would then review the decisions with the higher officials of the University.

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