INTRODUCING THE COLLEGE COUNSELLOR

INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS

Counselling is available in college on a weekday in Weeks 0-9 inclusive. Your College Counsellor is called Jonathan Totman.

Jonathan is a professional clinical psychologist and staff member of the University Counselling Service and is available to see students in Trinity on a Tuesday. Jonathan works one-to-one and occasionally runs small groups and workshops on topics relevant to student life.

How can counselling help me?
There are many benefits to working in a therapeutic relationship with a professional counsellor on an individual basis. It can be a relief to tell someone who is impartial about difficulties you have struggled with on your own. You may have a longstanding concern, be encountering new difficulties, or simply have a sense that something isn’t right.

The College Counsellor is here to help you gain understanding and insight into any difficulties you may be experiencing, to develop emotional resilience and put into effect real change, enabling you to fulfil your academic and personal potential. The College Counsellor offers free and confidential support, but does not offer an emergency service.

Is counselling provided in College any different from the counselling provided at the central university counselling service?
No. The counselling provided on-site within the college is exactly the same as that provided through the central service. Most college counsellors spend a portion of their working time at the central service and the remainder in college.

College Counselling is provided as a satellite of the University Counselling Service. This means that if you see the College Counsellor, you cannot also see someone at the central service. Equally, if you already see someone at the central service we would encourage you to return to see us there, rather than in college.

Just as in the central service, the role of the counsellor is to work with you in a relatively brief and focused way to get you feeling and functioning better as soon as possible.

The College Counsellor’s commitment to confidentiality is also the same as if you were seen in the central service: except in cases of imminent risk, there is no formal or informal discussion of an individual student with any member of the college or welfare team without that student’s express permission.

The counselling experience begins with initial email contact and pre-intake paperwork. At this stage a first session is arranged in which you and the Counsellor work together to make sense of your experience, to conceptualise your problems in new ways and to think together about how best to move forward. In some cases a single session is enough, whilst in other cases further sessions may be appropriate. Students who may benefit from using NHS specialist services, or other accessible services (liaison psychiatrist, groups, workshops, clinics etc) in the central counselling service, are encouraged and supported to access these.
What are the benefits of seeing College Counsellor?
Some students prefer to see someone in College, either because it is more convenient or because it means problems seem ‘less serious’. Whichever your preference, and for whatever reason, both the college counsellor and the central counselling service are available to support you.

Are there any disadvantages to seeing a College Counsellor?
Whether to see the College Counsellor or a Counsellor at the central service is entirely a matter of individual student preference.

We noted above that some students feel safer or more comfortable seeing a Counsellor in College. But of course others feel exactly the opposite: to these students, it feels better and safer to do this away from the setting in which they live and work. It should be emphasised that this is nothing to do with confidentiality: strict confidentiality will be maintained by the counsellor irrespective of where the counselling session takes place. This is purely an issue of what feels most comfortable to the individual.

In some cases, a student may want to talk in counselling about a relationship or friendship group issue which concerns other students in the same College. In this circumstance, going to see a Counsellor at the central service who is unlikely to have contact with others concerned may be a more natural option. Bear in mind that regardless of where you see the Counsellor, if they are aware that they are already seeing someone who is close to you, they will suggest that it would be a good idea for you to see someone else and will facilitate a change of Counsellor.

A student may have a strong preference to see a Counsellor of a different gender from the on-site Counsellor. This would also be a good reason for an individual to approach the central service, being clear about the gender preference.

The availability of a College Counsellor is more limited, being a fixed day or half-day a week, so those students who for academic reasons need to see a Counsellor in the evening, or a Saturday morning, are encouraged to contact the central service, where a greater variety of appointment times can be offered. For the same reasons, students absent from Oxford for academic reasons or for reasons of suspension who might wish to speak to a counsellor via Skype. Skype counselling is available at the central university service.

Some important differences between College counselling and school counselling
As you approach the Counsellor in your college at Oxford, it may be helpful, if you have already had counselling at your school, to understand more about how these experiences will differ in two important respects.

Firstly, there is a different question of time. College counselling is based on a brief therapy model. Your counsellor will work with you in a more focused way than the school counsellor is likely to have done. This reflects the fact that as a university student, you are used to working with a greater measure of independence, both in your studies, and in any personal work you undertake. This means working in relatively few sessions compared with the rather more open-ended and fluid style of work generally offered in school counselling contexts.

Secondly, there is a different set of aims. While you will be able to see the college counsellor within your college, rather than at the central university service, the Counsellor is not as fully integrated into college as a counsellor in school. A College Counsellor may, with your permission, liaise with other professionals if necessary, but primarily he or she aims to provide a thinking space for you.
This is distinct from many school counselling environments, which offer more flexibility, and can provide emotional containment for varying lengths of time. You can expect the counsellor in college to offer a level of therapeutic involvement which mirrors your adult status, and respects your increasing autonomy and sense of personal agency.

Need to Know

- Your College Counsellor is called Jonathan Totman
- Jonathan is available on a Tuesday
- Please contact him on jonathan.totman@admin.ox.ac.uk
- Jonathan works in the Surgery in Staircase 1.
- If this day of the week does not work for you, or you would prefer to use the central university counselling service please email counselling@admin.ox.ac.uk

Thank you

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