



NEED TO KNOW SERIES

Counseling 101



Being a young person is hard work; not to mention the added stress of keeping up with friends, family, social media, school, work, dealing with difficult people, and other things that can impact your day-to-day functioning. Counseling can be helpful for coping with daily stress and is good for your mind and body. It's important to take advantage of the counseling services made available to you, both in and out of care. Here's some information to get started.

Section 1

What is counseling?

There are many different resources that may help you take care of your mental health. Counseling can look different for everyone!

Section 2

How do I get started with counseling? Where do I find resources?

There are many ways to access counseling and to pay for it.

Section 3

What should I expect from my counseling session?

Your counseling session can look different depending on your needs.

Section 4

What if counseling isn't going well?

If counseling isn't working for you, that is okay! It might take some time to find the right counselor.

U.S. National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-724-TALK (8255)

Crisis Text Line is an anonymous texting service available 24/7. Starting a conversation is easy. Text GOT5 to 741741 or Got5U to 741741 if you're a college student.



What is counseling?



Mental health is just as important as physical health. Think of counseling as a doctor's appointment but for your mental health. It's a time for you to talk about anything that may be stressing you out like friendships, family issues, significant others, school, work, etc. A counselor will help you develop a plan to work on things that you want to work on; it is up to you!

It is common for people to struggle with the decision to seek counseling. If you are struggling, you are not alone.

There are many different resources that may help you take care of your mental health. Counseling can look different for everyone!

Professionals within the counseling field that you may hear about:

- Psychiatrist
- Psychiatric Nurse Practitioners
- Psychologist
- Clinical Social Workers
- Counselor/Therapist
- Trauma-Informed Counselor/Therapist
- Alcohol/Drug Counselors or Addiction Counselors
- Crisis Counselors
- Spiritual Leaders

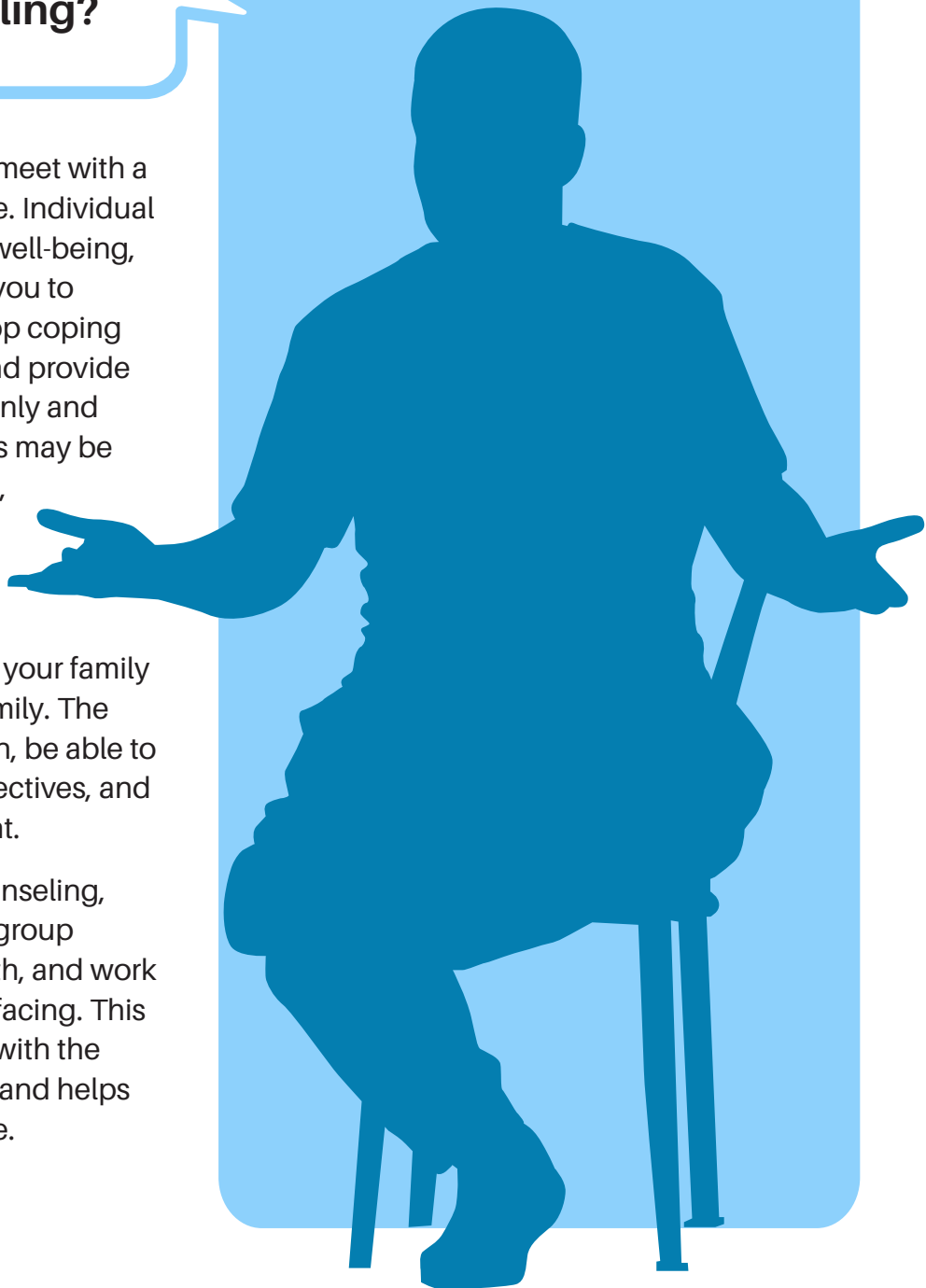


What are the different types of counseling?

Individual counseling: You will meet with a counselor or therapist one on one. Individual counseling promotes a sense of well-being, as your counselor will work with you to establish and reach goals, develop coping skills to handle life challenges, and provide a safe space for you to speak openly and freely. Some of these coping skills may be developing communication skills, identifying triggers, and learning how to process trauma.

Family counseling: A family counselor will work with you and your family to face challenges within your family. The goal is to improve communication, be able to see other family members' perspectives, and create a better family environment.

Group counseling: In group counseling, you'll meet with a counselor in a group setting that consists of other youth, and work to resolve any challenges you're facing. This type of counseling provides you with the ability to learn from other people and helps you understand you are not alone.





Who are the counselors?

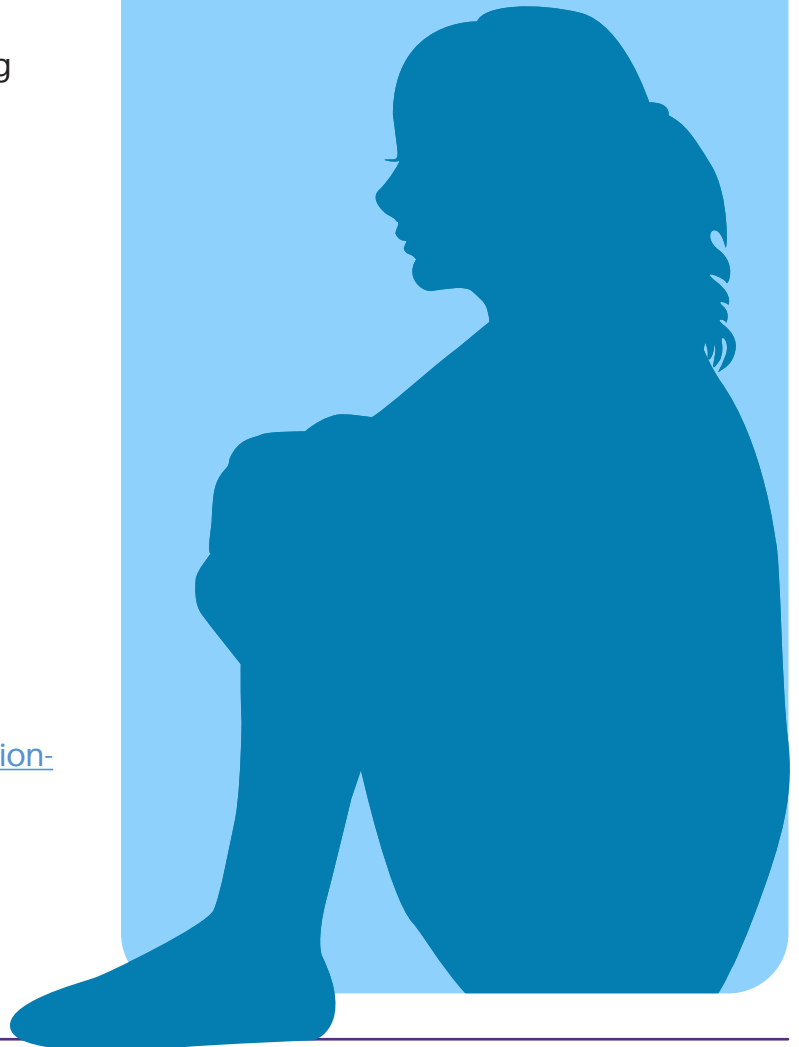
The letters after your counselor's name (LCSW, LCMHC, LCSW-R, M.S., MD, Ph.D., Psy.D., etc.) can get confusing.

Here's a resource to help you break it down:

- Good Therapy "Alphabet Soup: Decoding Mental Health Credentials"
<https://www.goodtherapy.org/blog/alphabet-soup-decoding-mental-health-credentials-0916145>

Here's a resource to help you understand what different accreditations, licenses, and certifications are out there:

- American Counseling Association "Accreditation, Licensure and Certification Defined"
<https://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/licensure-requirements/accreditation-licensure-and-certification-defined>





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Section 1.4

Resources

- American Psychological Association: “How to Choose a Psychologist”
<https://www.apa.org/topics/psychotherapy/choose-therapist>
- The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) can be a helpful resource. Their HelpLine volunteers answer questions, offer support and provide practical next steps. The NAMI HelpLine can be reached Monday through Friday, 10 a.m. – 10 p.m. Call 1-800-950-NAMI (6264), text “HelpLine” to 62640 or email helpline@nami.org
- Narcotics Anonymous (NA) is a support group available to individuals who have struggled with drug use. To find out more, including how to find a meeting near you go to <https://na.org>.
- Al-Anon is a support group for those who have been impacted by someone else’s drinking. Alateen is a support group made up of young people, mostly teenagers, whose lives have been impacted by someone else’s drinking. To find out more, including how to find a meeting near you go to <https://al-anon.org>.
- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration’s (SAMHSA) National Helpline, 1-800-662-HELP (4357) (also known as the Treatment Referral Routing Service) is a confidential, free, 24-hour-a-day, 365-day-a-year, information service, in English and Spanish, for individuals and family members facing mental and/or substance use disorders. This service provides referrals to local treatment facilities, support groups, and community-based organizations. Also visit the online treatment locator at <https://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>, or send your zip code via text message to 435748 (HELP4U) to find help near you.
- Alcoholics Anonymous (AA) is a support group available to individuals struggling with alcohol use. It doesn’t cost anything to attend A.A. meetings. To find out more, including how to find a meeting near you go to <https://alcoholicsanonymous.com/find-a-meeting>

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Section **2.1**

How do I get started with counseling? Where do I find resources?



There are many ways to access counseling and to pay for it.

First, you will want to explore why you want counseling. What are your goals? You will want to explore what type of counseling you're looking for. Your caseworker can also help you figure out what is the best option for your concerns. Are you looking to attend therapy in a group setting? One on one? With family? Once you figure out what kind of therapy you're looking for, you can start looking for a therapist.

Speak to your caseworker, school counselor, or primary doctor so they can help you find a counselor that meets your needs. If you're currently in foster care, reach out to your caseworker and ask for any resources they have for counseling services. Your caseworker is a great place to start when it comes to exploring your options. Be sure to ask about your health coverage and what providers in your area cover mental health counseling.

Be sure to check the insurance policies they accept, if any. You will want to see if their services are covered by your insurance, and if not, contact them about prices. Speak with your counselor about options for payment. Some therapists offer a sliding scale, meaning they'll work with you based on your income to come up with a price that works for you.

In addition, most universities and colleges have a counseling center and offer counseling services to students for free. Some universities and colleges offer free or low-cost counseling to non-students. Whether you are an enrolled student or a member of the community, reach out to the university or college counseling center to find out more.

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What should I expect from my counseling session?

Your counseling session can look different depending on your needs.

The first session is the place where you and your counselor begin to get to know each other. They may ask you some questions about your family, friends, experiences, likes and dislikes, goals, and what brought you to counseling. They may also ask about your personal medical history, including medications, medical issues, and previous mental health treatment.

Note: If any of these questions are uncomfortable for you, you can choose to pass on them. You are not required to answer any questions that make you feel uncomfortable.

How long will my session be?

Typically, sessions are forty-five minutes to an hour.

If you are seeing a psychiatrist, the session is usually much shorter with a focus on medications. A psychiatrist typically does not provide a counseling session, but will discuss how you are doing to determine if your medications are working for you, if there are any side effects, and if medications need to be adjusted or changed.



How can I prepare for my sessions?



It could be helpful to write down things you may want to share with your counselor. It can be difficult to remember what we want to share when we are “on the spot” so writing it down ahead of time might be useful.

Keep an open mind; remember, counseling is self-care.

Virtual vs. In-Person? What is the difference?

Virtual

- In your home or a location of your choosing (where you have access to the internet)
 - * Be sure to find a quiet, private place
- Log on 3-5 minutes before your scheduled appointment

In-Person

- In an office or a mutually agreed upon location
- Arrive 15 minutes prior to your scheduled appointment (look at their policy)
- Consider travel time





What does confidentiality mean?

Confidentiality means that your conversation remains between you and your counselor, except when there is a plan of harm to you or someone else. In a counseling session this may be one of the first things your counselor will discuss with you.

Here are some additional resources on confidentiality:

- What is Confidentiality?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?app=desktop&v=99cobXjKp9Q>
- American Psychological Association: "Protecting your Privacy: Understanding Confidentiality"
<https://www.apa.org/topics/psychotherapy/confidentiality>
- Simple Practice: "When Can a Therapist Break Confidentiality?"
<https://www.simplepractice.com/blog/therapist-break-confidentiality/>



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Section 4.1



What if counseling isn't going well?

If counseling isn't working for you, that is okay! It might take some time to find the right counselor, therapeutic approach, or treatment plan.

What if I don't agree with my counselor?

If you find you are not making a good connection with your counselor it may be time to explore other options such as a new therapist or a different form of therapy.

If you find yourself confused, unhappy, or uncomfortable with something your counselor suggested, don't be afraid to voice that. These are *your* sessions, your voice, thoughts, feelings, and opinions matter. There's no harm in asking your counselor to elaborate on something they've said or to give you a further look into their perspective.

During a counseling session you may talk about things that might be tough to discuss and possibly triggering. You need to be able to openly communicate this with your counselor so they can help you through it. If you do not feel that you can be open with your counselor then you have the right to explore a counselor you feel comfortable with.

Here is a resource with additional information:

- Talkspace: "Why You Might Feel Bad (Or Worse) After Therapy"
<https://www.talkspace.com/blog/why-you-might-feel-bad-or-worse-after-therapy/>

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