



Confidentiality, Disclosure & Informed Consent for Students Receiving Counseling Services

Welcome to Samuel Merritt University's *Counseling Center*. Please read the information on the front and back of this paper carefully. It describes some of the policies of the counseling center and outlines important rights and responsibilities of which you should be aware. We encourage you to discuss any part of this information with your counselor.

Nature of Services:

Counseling and psychotherapy are not easily described in general statements. (The terms "psychotherapy" and "counseling" and the terms "psychotherapist", "psychologist" and "counselor" are used interchangeably in this form). There are different styles and methods of psychotherapy that can be effective. Counseling begins with an initial appointment for a screening consultation to determine your needs and to discuss counseling options. At this time your therapist will try to use the therapeutic approach that best fits with you and your specific problems. If your concerns require longer-term or specialized counseling, the counselor may recommend a referral off-campus.

In order to provide service to as many students as possible, the counseling center is oriented toward a shorter-term counseling model consisting of *10 sessions* per student, per calendar year. Also, because of limited resources, the counseling center can not provide counseling or other services as part of a court mandated probation requirement, nor can counselors serve as witnesses in connection with any court proceeding.

Therapy is a joint effort and is most beneficial when you put forth active effort during and outside the sessions. For most people, psychological counseling is a positive and helpful experience. It often reduces feelings of distress, leads to improved relationships, and teaches new skills to manage specific concerns. But there are no guarantees about the outcome. Psychotherapy presents both benefits and risks. Unforeseen changes may occur in relationships or in familiar ways of coping. You may experience unpleasant feelings or recall distressing memories. Facing such challenging experiences may be necessary to realize the benefits of therapy. On occasion, counseling fails to relieve distress, in which case other resources may be recommended.

General Information:

Usually clients see their counselor by appointment, once a week for a session of approximately 45 – 50 minutes. Counseling is available throughout the academic year when classes are in session. You must be currently enrolled and registered for classes to receive counseling services, unless otherwise agreed upon between you and your counselor. Students are responsible for notifying their counselor of changes in their enrollment status.

Your promptness is important in order for you to take full advantage of your counseling sessions. It is your responsibility to keep scheduled appointments.

- **Cancelled/Rescheduled Appointments:** If you need to cancel or reschedule an appointment you are responsible for contacting the counseling center at least 24 hours in advance (510-869-1516).
- **Missed Appointments:** If you do not show for a regular appointment, you need to call the counseling center to reschedule. Without 24 hours notice, missed appointments will count as one of your ten counseling sessions. If you miss a scheduled session and don't contact the counseling center, subsequent scheduled appointments will not be reserved for you. If you have no contact with the counseling center for four academic weeks, your file will be closed. Of course, you are welcome to resume contact with the counseling center at any time during your enrollment at Samuel Merritt University.

If you decide to discontinue services at the counseling center, we would like you to discuss this with your therapist in session. If for any reason you are unable to do so, please call and let the center know of your intention so that services will not be delayed for other students.

Contacting the Counseling Services Office:

The counseling center office can be reached Monday through Friday between 9:00 – 5:00 p.m., by calling 510-869-1516. You can leave a confidential message after hours or if the counselor is in session. Office hours are subject to change, particularly during summer term, holidays, and breaks. Counselors do not routinely check voice or e-mail messages after hours, during weekends or during vacation periods. ***Due to these limitations, emails and voicemails should not be used in emergency or crisis situations.***

Confidentiality:

All information shared during psychological counseling sessions is confidential. Due to the limited size of the counseling center staff and in order to provide the best possible services to the student, counseling center staff members will at times confer with other mental health professionals and/or school personnel for professional supervisory purposes. During these professional consultations, only the minimum information necessary to best serve and/or protect you is shared. Should a counselor need to communicate with a third party outside of the counseling center (e.g., a doctor, a parent, a school official or institution) regarding your treatment, s/he will request that you sign a Release of Information Consent Form. Information will not be disclosed outside of the department without your written consent, except as allowed by law in the following situations:

1. **Child and/or Elder Abuse:** If a counselor or other qualified individual has reason to believe that a child under the age of 18 or a dependent adult is being abused or neglected, s/he is legally required to report the situation to the appropriate state agency.
2. **Imminent Harm to Self:** If a counselor or other qualified individual has reason to believe that you are in danger of physically harming yourself, and if you are unwilling or unable to follow specific counseling recommendations, s/he may have to make an involuntary referral to a hospital and/or contact a family member or other person who may be able to help you protect you. Appropriate University officials, medical, or law enforcement personnel will be notified to ensure the safety of the student and the community.
3. **Imminent Harm to Others:** If a counselor or other qualified individual has reason to believe that you are seriously threatening physical violence against another person, or if you have a history of violent behavior, s/he may be required to take some action to insure the safety of the other person.
4. **Legal Demands:** If legal demands to release information are made (e.g. subpoenas), we will make every attempt to inform you before any confidential information is released.

These exceptions are rare and whenever possible we will discuss with you any action being considered. If the disclosure of information does become necessary, we will only release the minimum information needed to protect you or others.

*****A Note on Email Communication:**

Email correspondence is potentially vulnerable to interception and therefore confidentiality cannot be fully guaranteed. However, we also understand that email is the preferred method of communication for many students. Email is most often used for requesting general information regarding our services, scheduling appointment, referrals/resources, or other campus information. Counseling Services staff never conduct “therapy” via email and try to keep all email communication to a minimum.

Only provide your email address below if you agree that we can contact you by email when needed, including sending a survey at the end of the year to evaluate the services you received. In addition, counselors do not routinely check voice or e-mail messages after hours, during weekends or during vacation periods. Due to these limitations, emails and voicemails should not be used in emergency or crisis situations.

Please indicate: I give Counseling Center staff permission to communicate with me via e-mail
 I would like no communication from Counseling Center via e-mail.

Email address _____ ***if agree**

Client Files:

California law and professional ethics require counselors at the counseling center to keep records of those who use its services. Your file consists of the intake forms, documentation of visits, an assessment report, brief session notes, any written or e-mail communication between you and your counselor, records/consultations obtained with your authorization, results of any testing, and a termination summary. Files are kept in a secure, locked file cabinet. Only authorized counseling center staff have access to your file. Any records kept on the computer will be password protected. There is no record of your use of the counseling center apart from this confidential file. The records are destroyed seven years after the last year you were seen.

After Hour Emergencies:

The counseling center office closes at 5:00 p.m. Monday – Friday during normal academic periods. In the case of an after hours mental health crisis or emergency, contact the following resources:

- Alameda County Crisis Contact Line (800-309-2131)
- National Crisis Hotline (800-273-TALK).
- ***In any life-threatening situation, CALL 911 immediately***

I have read and understand the above information regarding counseling services at Samuel Merritt University. I understand the provisions and I freely initiate counseling. I understand that I may stop treatment at any time. I have also been given a copy of this form to keep and refer to as needed.

Signed _____ **Date** _____