

## **Counselling and Academic counselling in Universities**

In any university with a large number of students, there would be some who need special help to overcome problems of a personal nature which the person may not be able to resolve without somebody else's help. Ideally, the closest persons one can think of are fellow students and academics. Often, these two categories of people do not have sufficient training or skills or desire to help persons in need. To become a trained counsellor, one needs special training and should possess a body of knowledge in the area of psychological counselling. However, it is possible to develop some skills which may help a person understand a problem issue causing anxiety in a person and befriend him/her and release the mental burden to some degree. If such help is not given in time the sufferer might do something drastic such as attempt suicide, drop out from the academic program or become a mental wreck which would prolong the agony. Sometimes, there may be more than one party involved in the problem issue. Hence, there may be social consequences as well.

Very often, academics might view teaching as the only important task they are expected to do. Hence, modern universities have decided to use a new term which better states what academics have to do. This term concept states that academics need to serve as **academic enablers** as well. This highlights the importance of facilitating the overall development of the student.

### **Do you have the characteristics of a good counselor?**

Counselling may not be something we all can do effectively. It requires counselling motivation and certain attributes which makes the task easy to perform. Let's look at personal attributes of individuals which would make them effective counsellors. Please answer the following questions honestly and evaluate areas which need further strengthening.

Would you consider yourself as a:

(Answer using the following scale: Very much=5; Somewhat=4; Can't say=2; Not very=1; Never=0)

1. Sensitive person capable of understanding others' feelings? .....
2. Caring person? .....
3. Compassionate person? .....
4. Empathetic person? .....
5. Someone who enjoys working with people on a one-to-one basis? .....
6. Someone who can easily build rapport with others? .....
7. Person capable of maintaining confidentiality? .....
8. Aware of own emotions and those of others? .....
9. Person capable of keeping your calm in crises? .....
10. Non-domineering person? .....
11. Person whose advice is sought by others in times of distress? .....
12. Person who is patient most of the time? .....

13. Person capable of listening to others without interrupting? .....
14. Person endowed with analytical and problem solving skills? .....
15. Person with helping attitudes towards others? .....

High scores in the above questionnaire would make you suitable for counselling. If you scored low on certain aspects, ask yourself what you could do to improve things. Remember that nobody is perfect: 'perfection' may be a path and not a destination.

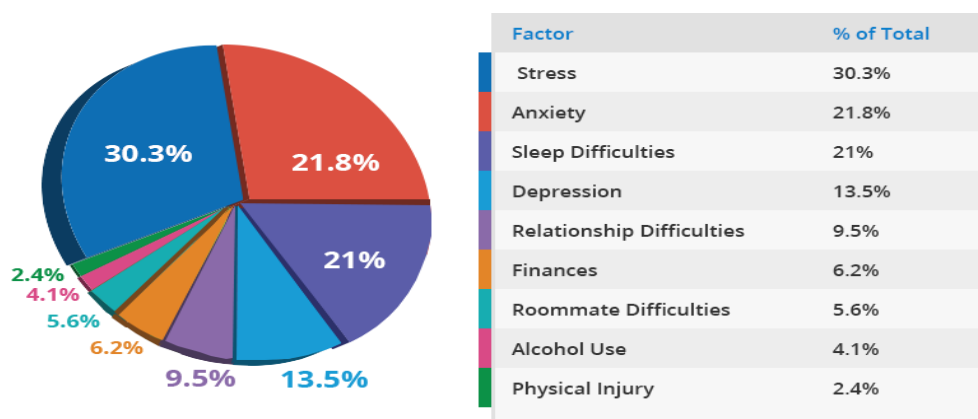
## Why do people need counselling?

There are some myths concerning counselling. One is that counselling is needed by weak minded persons. The reality is that counselling can be needed by any normal person with an adjustment or coping problem to face a certain issue which the person cannot solve without outside help. Another myth is that counselling is required by persons with psychological problems. A third is that one should try to solve one's own problems by using one's own strong will power. Even very strong persons can experience times when they can't manage situations by themselves. So, let us look at what traumatises a person. Let's focus on life's crises ...

Note: It is not the event that determines whether something is traumatic to someone, but the individual's experience of the event

Emotional trauma contains the following three common elements:

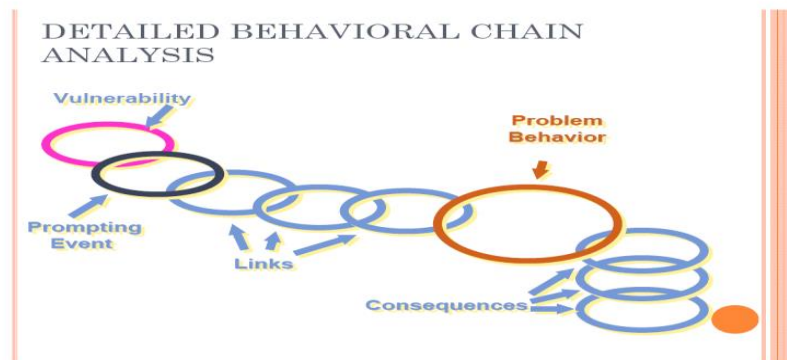
- It was unexpected
- The person was unprepared
- The person could do nothing to prevent it from happening



<https://www.affordablecollegesonline.org/college-student-mental-health/>

- Fig. 1. Problems faced by students.

## Behavioural chain of persons experiencing emotional trauma



The first link in the chain is **Vulnerability**. What we have to understand is that no two persons are the same when it comes to coping with a traumatic situation. Scientists now say that 50% of our traits are due to genes while the other 50% is due to environmental influences such as experiencing poverty, bad parenting, sickness, etc. So, something one person considers as a joke can be a traumatic event for another.

The second link is **Prompting event**. This is the reason why the person developed the problem. What counsellors need to understand is that this prompting event can be hidden under many other manifestations of problem behaviours, as there could be multiple links between the prompting event and the Problem behaviour.

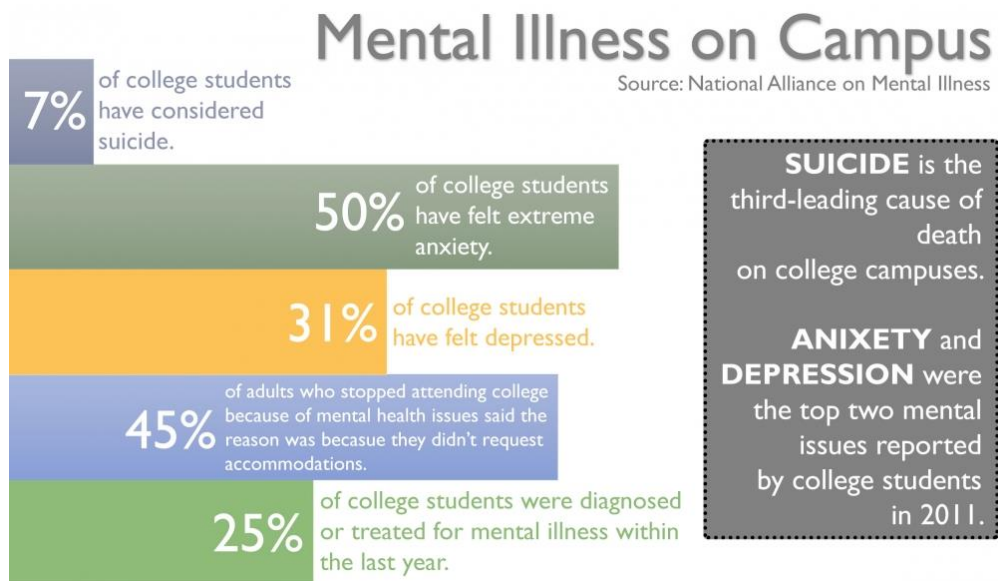
The third link is **Problem Behaviour**. This is what made others around a person see that the given person is having a problem! For example, this may be a suicide attempt. On the surface, many links might cover the real reason behind the drastic behaviour. It is the counsellor's job to unmask the real problem hidden behind the other links.

It is counsellor's duty to minimize adverse consequences which may arise due to the problem behaviour and make the client get back on track to leading a normal life.

**Help given too late is no help! Be concerned. You may be able to change a person's life.**

**Worksheet: Typical problems you noted in students, where you feel counselling might have helped**

| <b>Problem category</b>  | <b>Event</b> | <b>Consequences</b> |
|--|--------------|---------------------|
| <b>Personal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Love affairs</li> <li>• Loss of a loved one</li> <li>• Sickness</li> <li>• Psychological problems</li> <li>• Stress</li> <li>• Anger management issues</li> <li>• Body image issues</li> <li>• Adjusting to culture</li> <li>• Violation of rules and regulations</li> <li>• Substance abuse</li> </ul> |              |                     |
| <b>Interpersonal</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Victim of aggression (Verbal abuse/ Physical abuse)</li> <li>• Being the aggressor</li> <li>• Social isolation</li> <li>• Conflicts</li> <li>• Violence</li> <li>• Bullying</li> </ul>   |              |                     |
| <b>Academic</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poor grades</li> <li>• Failing exams</li> <li>• Poor choice of academic programs</li> <li>• Language related issues</li> <li>• Missing the batch</li> </ul>   |              |                     |



### Depression: A major problems affecting students in universities



## DSM V Criteria Major Depression

Five or more of the following symptoms have been present during the same 2 week period and represent a change from previous functioning and at least one of the symptoms is either (1) depressed mood or (2) loss of interest or pleasure:

- 1) depressed mood most of the day
- 2) markedly diminished interest or pleasure in activities
- 3) significant weight changes
- 4) insomnia or hypersomnia
- 5) psychomotor agitation or retardation
- 6) fatigue or loss of energy
- 7) feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt
- 8) diminished ability to think or concentrate, indecisiveness
- 9) recurrent thoughts of death

## Counselling

According to the American Counselling Association, counselling is:

- “The application of mental health, psychological or human development principles, through cognitive, affective, behavioural or systemic interventions, strategies that address wellness, personal growth, or career development, as well as pathology.”
- Let's simplify what this definition means. In layman's terms, cognitive, affective and behavioral interventions mean that counseling deals with doing things to change the way people **understand things**, **feel** about issues and problems and **behave or react in situations** which cause them to experience difficulties. The issues addressed may relate to personal growth in the student's ability set targets or they may relate to problems of career development. **The concept of career development relates to a person's development in a chosen profession throughout that person's working life.** Thus, career development may be important not only to students but also other professionals in a university. Pathology simply means that the relevant person has issues with mental health. This requires a non-professional helper to refer the affected person to a medical center which could help him/her with the problem.

## Important characteristics of a counsellor

Carl Rogers, who was one of the foremost experts in person-centred counselling, has identified several core conditions necessary for counselling to be successful. They are;

- **Empathy**  
Empathy is the ability to see and understand things from the client's perspective. We often refer to empathy as the ability get into others' shoes. The purpose is to promote *promotes rapport and relationship*.
- **Unconditional Positive Regard**  
*Considers the client as a person of worth regardless of the personal or social background, or actions or behaviours*

- **Genuineness**

This is the ability of the counselor to be real and not pretend to be someone else.

- Having a sense of humor - we put our guard down and do not act defensively.
- Show that our words, thoughts and body language match one another

- **Warmth**

- Is the physical expression of understanding and caring
- It is ordinarily communicated nonverbally through gestures, posture, tone of voice, touch, and facial expressions

## **Counseling process ...**

- Counseling process is supportive, insightful, re-educative, and usually short term
- It involves a series of steps designed to;
  - Help people clearly state why they want to seek help
  - Assist clients to formulate goals and expectations for treatment
  - Diagnose areas of concern relating to dysfunctional behaviours or areas needing improvement
  - Discuss the underlying issues and concerns
  - Supporting and accepting the client as a person of worth
  - Selectively reinforce behaviors that are fully functioning and helpful in achieving set goals
  - Confronting or challenging client's thoughts, language or behaviours to:
    - Challenge assumptions which are wrong, self-destructive or irrational
    - Uncover hidden and unconscious motives behind actions
    - Encourage people to accept more responsibility for their actions or choices
    - Structure opportunities for new ways of behaving or dealing with issues
    - Facilitate greater independence

You might not develop the skills required for counseling in a very short session, but you can certainly become an advisor to students of your faculty. Assumptions made when instituting an academic advising program are shown below:

- Faculty members have the interest and the requisite skills to deal with student issues in one-to-one situations with students.
- Faculty members are suitable as advisors in areas concerning personality development, self concept and related issues
- Academics have sufficient time to allocate for student counselling
- Academics are sufficiently motivated to spend time and energy on dealing with student issues



Common definitions of an academic advisor's role contain the following:

- Identification of the student's aims and plans for the future and understand how they could be achieved using the student's abilities, skills and talents
- Help develop a coherent plan of action to achieve set objectives in different arenas (personal, social and academic)
- Assist the student achieve his full potential in a collaborative atmosphere
- The interaction between the academic advisor and the student is an one-to-one relationship
- Develop a caring trusting relationship between the two parties

Academic skills are, and should be, the primary focus of instruction in education establishments. However, recent research suggests that student achievement also depends on academic enablers. Academic enablers are attitudes and behaviours that allow a student to participate in, and ultimately benefit from, academic instruction in the classroom. These enablers include motivation, interpersonal skills, engagement, and study skills ([http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/news/coverstories/academic\\_enablers.php](http://www.wcer.wisc.edu/news/coverstories/academic_enablers.php)).

Most universities have academic advisors assigned to students upon their entry to the relevant faculty. This is often done by randomly picking students and assigning them to academics that may or may not want be engaged in counselling. Ideally, academic advising should address student issues from year one to graduation, because of the range of problems faced by the student throughout the period of stay in the university.

#### Role of a faculty advisor

The role of the faculty advisor has been described by Hardee and Mayhew in the following ways:

1. The adviser will assist the student in effecting a program of study consonant with the latter's interests and competencies.
2. The adviser will assist the student in periodic evaluation of his academic progress.
3. The adviser will assist the student in initial exploration of long range occupational and professional plans, referring him to sources for specialized assistance.
4. The adviser will serve as coordinator of the learning experiences of the student, assisting in the integration of the various kinds of assistance rendered

The ability of the academic advisor to be a facilitator who fosters the development of student capability would largely depend on the advisor's knowledge of many aspects related to university life and resources available on campus. The advisor has to have a comprehensive knowledge of the curriculum, rules and regulations applicable to students. Further, the advisor should have an in-depth knowledge on issues relevant to the world of work (job market, employment opportunities, etc.).

The academic advisor has to help the student understand and adopt suitable behaviours for achievement of goals in line with expectations of the university in respect of teaching, learning and developing suitable lifestyles on campus.



The advisor and the students are expected work within a collaborative framework by using a variety of tools:

- Promoting reflection
- Facilitate course correction by commenting, reviewing, questioning, directing where necessary
- Listening to student concerns and guiding accordingly
- Providing for intellectual stimulation

**Space for your notes:**