

STUDY UK DISCOVER YOU



INTERVIEW WITH A UNIVERSITY COUNSELLOR



Anne Bentley is a counsellor and the manager of Student Wellbeing Services at the University of Plymouth. We spoke to her to find out how counsellors support students in British universities.

What is the role of a counsellor in a UK university?

Coming to university is very exciting but it can also be very stressful. There are so many new things to think about and being away from home can be hard. Having to live in a different culture is exciting and you will certainly get the chance to meet new people, try new activities, eat new food and improve your English.

However, adjusting to a new university and a new country can be tiring. You may miss familiar things from home, particularly family and friends. Sometimes you may feel lonely and you may be finding it hard to make new friends.

Counsellors are there to support you when things get tough. They understand the pressures that you are facing and are trained to help you to find ways of dealing with the issues that are making you feel worried so that you can get the most out of university life.

University counsellors also know a lot about the many services available to international students and can also help make sure that you know about any other services or activities that could be useful to you.

How will a counsellor help me?

A counsellor's job is to listen to you and to help you to understand more about what is making you feel worried or upset. A counsellor will be warm and supportive. They will gently ask you questions and help you find ways to sort out the things that are worrying you. They won't tell you what to do and they won't think badly of you for coming to seek help.

Who will know if I go and see a counsellor?

No one outside of the counselling service will know that you have been unless you want them to know. Your tutors, friends and family will not know that you have been to see a counsellor.

Counselling is private and the counsellor will not tell anyone that you have been to see them unless you ask them to. This is called confidentiality and all counsellors will discuss this with you when you see them.

However, if the counsellor is worried about your safety or that of others, they may need to speak to other people to keep you safe. If this was to happen the counsellor would always try and talk with you first.

How do I know if I should go and talk to a counsellor?

If you are worrying a lot and finding that life is not as enjoyable as you would like, then it may be a good idea to talk to someone as soon as possible. Please do not suffer in silence. A counsellor will always be glad to talk to you and it doesn't matter if your problems seem big or small. Counsellors will not judge you or think badly of you for seeking help.

You might want to book an appointment with a counsellor if:

- you are missing lectures and deadlines
- you are finding it hard to get out of bed
- you are finding it hard to get to sleep
- you are not talking with friends as much as you used to and are spending much longer periods of time on your own
- you are crying more than you used to
- you are feeling hopeless and very sad a lot of the time
- you are eating more
- you are eating less
- other people have noticed changes in you and are worried about you
- you find yourself feeling angry a lot more.

The list above is only a short guidance. You can go and talk to a counsellor about ANYTHING that is bothering you.

If I see a counsellor does it mean that I am mentally ill?

No. In the UK, people with all kinds of problems go and see a counsellor and find it very helpful. Most students only need to see a counsellor for between four and six sessions and find that this is enough to help them feel better.

My English isn't very good, should I still go and see a counsellor?

Yes please do. University counsellors are used to seeing students from many different countries and understand how hard it can be to talk about personal things in a second language. Your counsellor will be patient and kind and will always be glad that you came to see them. Even if you think that your English is not good, the counsellor will help you to find ways of talking about what is bothering you.

Remember the hardest thing is taking the first step. Most international students find the support, warmth and kindness of their counsellor helpful and most students are glad they went and spoke to a counsellor, with many saying that they wished they had gone earlier.

What to do if you would like to see a counsellor

If you think it would help to see a counsellor get in touch with the student wellbeing services at your university. Your personal tutor may also be able to put you in touch with services offering specialist help.