

Informed Consent for Counselling at the University of Lethbridge¹

Purpose: For you to understand the process and nature of counselling as well as the associated risks and benefits, in order for you to make informed decision about whether to participate or not.

Welcome to Counselling!

Congratulations! Making it through our door is not an easy step for many students. Engaging in counselling takes a lot of courage and provides you with the opportunity to discover much about yourself. For many students, this will be your first experience with counselling, and we believe it is important to be clear and transparent about what counselling is, and what counselling looks like at University of Lethbridge Counselling Services. Please read through the attached materials carefully and bring up any questions that you have so that we can discuss them. Next, we will ask that you sign the form once we have discussed it so that we will have in our records that you read and had the opportunity to discuss the information with your counsellor.



About Counselling: Some Risks and Benefits

Counselling is different than talking to a friend or family member. Our conversations have specific goals, and although your counsellor will be supportive, they also will challenge you. Sometimes you might feel annoyed, tired or upset following a session. This can happen as you are processing new ways of thinking or because you've spoke about something that's been upsetting to you. As a result of counselling, you may experience changes in your relationships or beliefs that have unexpected results. Usually these changes are very positive in the long – term, but it may be difficult to experience as they are occurring.

Your counsellor may suggest trying specific techniques in counselling (i.e., relaxation exercises). If you have any questions about these techniques it's important you ask. It's also important to know *you have the right to stop any exercise at any time during the session*. Counselling is one form of treatment for client problems- other forms include medications for psychological symptoms, church groups, and physical activity (i.e., yoga). Feel free to ask your counselor for referral information.

¹ Permission is granted to use this form provided the following reference is used:

Rowland, H., McBride, D., Ellis-Toddington, J. (2010). *Informed consent for counselling at the University of Lethbridge*. Retrieved from University of Lethbridge Counselling Services (Canada) website: www.uleth.ca/counselling/

The Relationship with Your Counsellor



The relationship you have with your counsellor is different than other relationships. You will be sharing important details with your counsellor, but you will know little about them. This can be difficult sometimes, but as a professional, your counsellor is part of an association that has rules about the types of interactions they are allowed to have with clients. Your counselor is prohibited from engaging in a “dual relationship” with you, or one other than that of client and therapist.

As part of these rules your counsellor:

- Cannot have any other kind of business relationship with you besides the therapy itself.
- Cannot be your therapist if they are related to you or if they are your friend.
- Cannot give legal, medical, financial, or any other type of professional advice.
- Cannot have any kind of romantic, friendship, or sexual relationship with a former or current client, or with any people close to a client.
- Cannot give or receive gifts from clients except tokens with personal meaning to the therapy process.
- Cannot be your supervisor, teacher, or evaluator while engaged in counselling with you.
- Cannot attend personal parties/events of clients even if you invite them

Because your counsellor is very concerned about protecting your confidentiality, your counsellor will not approach or acknowledge you if s/he sees you in the hallway or in the community. This is not meant to be rude, but rather to protect your privacy.

When you have a counsellor, it's important you feel safe with this person. Counsellors should seem real or genuine, and should listen to you and help you find the answers you already know. Sometimes, even though counsellors might be a great fit for a friend, they may not be a good fit for you. If you realize you're not comfortable with your counsellor, *you have a right to request a referral.*

Likewise, *counsellors have a right to feel safe in their work*, and also can ask that your care be transferred should they feel uncomfortable or that they are not the best counsellor for you. This can occur if counsellors believe their personal values, experiences, or reactions will interfere with their ability to provide you with the best care possible.

As you and your counsellor have the right to feel safe, it is asked that you do not attend sessions while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. This helps to enhance individual safety, while ensuring your participation and disclosures in counselling are voluntary and deliberate. If it becomes apparent that your judgment is impacted by drugs or alcohol, your counsellor may end the current session and ask you to come back.

Counselling & Confidentiality

Except in specific situations, *you have the right to confidentiality in your counselling.*



Your counsellor cannot tell other people about your counselling. This means that we cannot speak to your friends, parents, teachers etc. without your permission. If you would like us to share information with other people, such as an academic advisor or doctor, you must give us written permission. *You have the right to change your mind and revoke that permission at any time.*

Legally, we may need to share our concerns with others if we have concerns about safety. Your counsellor is legally bound to break your privacy if they believe:

- You are in imminent danger of harming yourself or know of another person in harms way
- You will harm another person
- A child (age 0-18) is being abused, neglected or is a witness of abuse
- A dependent adult is being harmed or abused
- If your record is subpoenaed. The counsellor may advocate limiting the information admissible, but the court can access your file.

The counsellors at U of L Counselling Services also *reserve the right* to disclose to the proper authorities and/or individuals and take action should they discover:

- Worrisome behaviours or history relevant to violence threat/risk assessment.
Information in this situation would be shared with relevant members of the U of L Behavioural Incident Committee and/or Security.
- Harm and cruelty to animals.
- Maltreatment of clients by a helping professional.
- Criminal activities (past or current)
- Client is taking legal action against their assigned counsellor.

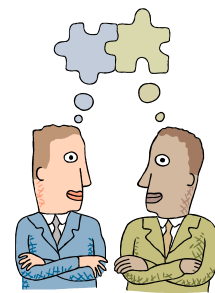
Your counsellor will most likely inform you of who they are contacting to help ensure the safety of yourself or others.

Communication

Should we need to contact you, we will try to reach you via the telephone number you've provided to us on the intake form. If our receptionist is phoning you, the number will come up as blocked on your phone. If your counsellor is contacting you from their direct line, their name and extension number may appear on your phone. At times, we may communicate via email. Please be aware that email is not completely confidential. Any email received or sent to your counsellor will be printed out and kept in your file, so discretion on your part is advised.

Confidentiality and Supervision

To ensure the best service to you, your counsellors engage in supervision. This means that your counsellor may share details of your situation with the other counsellors at U of L Counselling Services. They share information to help others learn, or to get feedback on what they may want to do differently in the sessions. These discussions are focused on helping improve the quality of work your counsellor does, and only the details relevant to a particular aspect of your care will be discussed.



As part of the supervision process, you may be asked if one of your sessions can be videotaped. These tapes will not be taken off Counselling Services premises, and will be destroyed after 21 days. They will be kept in a locked filing cabinet accessed only by your counsellor and the agency director when not in use. A supervisor or student may also observe a session by sitting in the room or via a two way mirror. *You have the right to stop taping or observation at any time during the session, and you have a right to refuse observation or recording of your counselling work.* Observation and recording will only occur if you sign the "consent for observation/recording" form.

Your counsellor may access consultation from trained professionals in the community and may engage in group supervision. The names of external supervisors and participants are available upon request. When participating in off-site supervision, your counsellor will not share your name in order to protect your confidentiality.

Who has Access to Your Information?

At Counselling Services, we utilize an on-line calendar. This means that the receptionist and the other counsellors employed by Counselling Services may see your first name, last initial and ID number in the calendar. The calendar may be accessed electronically from any computer and is password protected, but there is a risk that third parties may see your first name and last initial in the system. If a court subpoenas a copy of the calendar, a third party may also see those details.

The receptionist has access to your "University of Lethbridge Counselling Services: Confidential Client Information Form" which you fill out before your first session. Afterwards, this form is stored in your client file. Our receptionist is bound by an oath of confidentiality and *never* has the right to release your information or your identifying information to anyone other than the counsellors within the agency.

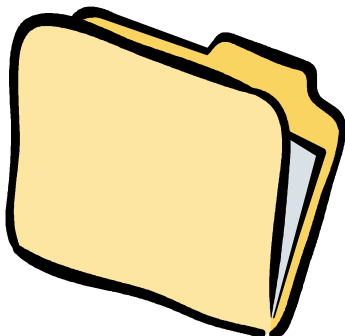
Release of Information Forms

Should you or your counsellor wish to discuss your situation with another individual or agency, you will need to complete a release of information form stating who they are allowed to speak with and the type of information they can release. Please know that other units and health centres may not be bound by the same confidentiality rules as Counselling Services. If your counsellor is writing a letter on your behalf, you will have an opportunity to review the letter and may request a copy for your own records. Often you will be expected to take the letter to the other party yourself, as opposed to faxing or mailing options. If you are picking up documents at our reception desk, you will be required to show ID.



Your File

When you make contact with Counselling Services, a file will be started with your identifying information (name, student ID) on it. This file will include:



- a copy of your transcripts
- your intake form
- consent to release information forms
- consent to participate in counselling form
- copies of any letters written on your behalf
- case notes
- case file from previous counselling contact should you be a returning client

You have full access to your file, and may request it at any time. You may request your counsellor copy the case notes as counselling proceeds, so you can keep your own file.

How Your Information is Stored

Counselling Services uses a shared filing system. However, your specific counselor may choose to keep their files in a separate locked cabinet. This means that our receptionist and the other counsellors on site have access to where your files are stored. Our filing policy is as follows:

- All files are stored in locked cabinets in an alarmed area.
- Your file will be closed when you and your counsellor terminate counselling, or if we have not heard from you after 30 days.
- Files will be shredded after 10 years.



Fees and Access to Services

There are no fees for counselling. There may be fees for special testing which would be discussed should the need arise. Counselling is available only to U of L students currently registered or who graduated no more than one term ago. To meet the demands of our student body, we generally offer students 8-10 sessions. In consultation with their counselor, students who require more long-term, on-going counseling are generally referred to an outside community agency.

Complaint Procedure

If you have a concern about your counselling, we hope you will talk to your counsellor. We take criticisms and suggestions seriously, and will try to respond with care and respect. If you are unable to resolve things with your counselor, believe that your counsellor will be unwilling to listen and respond, or that they have behaved unethically, you can contact Barbara Williams, the Coordinator of Counselling Services at (403) 317 2845. If you are still not satisfied with the result, you may contact your counsellor's professional association to file a complaint. Your counsellor should inform you of their professional association during your first meeting and should have their credentials on display in their office. The contact numbers for the professional associations to which the counselors at the U of L belong are: College of Alberta Psychologists (780-424-5070), Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (613-237-1099), and Alberta College of Social Workers (780-421-1167).

Client Consent to Counselling

- I have read the Personal Counselling Informed Consent document, had sufficient time to consider it carefully, asked any questions that I needed to, and understand it.
- I understand the limits to confidentiality required by law, and those indicated by my counselor. _____ **(initial)**
- I understand that if I threaten to harm myself, others, and/or a child/dependent adult, my counselor is required to protect these individuals at the expense of protecting my privacy. _____ **(initial)**
- I understand my rights and responsibilities as a client, and my therapist's responsibilities.
- I know I can end therapy at any time I wish, can request another counsellor and that I can refuse any requests or suggestions made by my counsellor.
- I am over the age of eighteen, or have been designated a mature minor.
- I understand that I have the right to talk openly and honestly with my counsellor, and will try to provide my counsellor with feedback about how I think counselling is working.
- I will do my best to attend scheduled appointments even if I do not always feel like it. If I cannot attend an appointment, I will contact my counsellor prior to the appointment to cancel or reschedule. If I am late for an appointment, I understand it will still end at the original time.
- I agree to engage in counseling under the conditions outlined in this document.

Client Name (print)

Signature

Date

For your counsellor:

- I, the counsellor, have discussed the issues within this consent with my client
- My observations of this person's behaviour and responses indicate that this person understands the rules and provisions of counselling as set out above and is competent to give informed and willing consent at this time.

Signature of U of L Therapist

Date

Date of Last Revision: September 9, 2010