

Using campus counseling

Easy · 15 min to book · Often free for enrolled students

Most colleges have a counseling center for students, and at many schools it's free or already covered by your fees. What you say is confidential, with a few safety exceptions. You usually start with a short first appointment to sort out what kind of help fits, and many centers also offer quick drop-in chats, groups and same-day crisis help. You don't need a crisis to go.

YOU'LL NEED

- ☐ Your student ID or login
- ☐ Your school's counseling center website or phone number
- ☐ A rough idea of what's been going on (a few notes is plenty)

WHAT TO KNOW

- 1 Find it.** Search your school's site for "counseling center" or ask your RA or student health. A school health or counseling center is one of NIMH's suggested places to look for help.
- 2 Know you don't need a crisis.** Common reasons students go include stress, low motivation, breakups, roommate or family problems, homesickness, sleep trouble, substance use, grief, loneliness and sexual assault or harassment.
- 3 Book the first appointment online, by phone or in person.** At the University of Maryland, for example, it's a roughly 30-minute brief assessment to talk about your needs and options. At UMass Amherst it's a 45-minute consultation, and most students get one within one to two weeks.
- 4 Expect paperwork first: consent forms, an intake form and short questionnaires about symptoms.**
- 5 At the end, the counselor recommends next steps: individual sessions, a group, a referral, or psychiatric care for medication questions.**
- 6 Need to talk sooner?** Many schools have quick options. UMass's Let's Talk is a free 15-minute Zoom check-in, same day or next day. UW offers drop-in Let's Talk sessions too.
- 7 In a crisis, tell the front desk you need to be seen today.** UMD, for example, offers same-day urgent visits and phone crisis help after hours. For a life-threatening emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest ER.

Watch out Confidential doesn't mean no exceptions. At UMD, records stay separate from your educational records and can't be seen by parents or professors without your written permission or a court order. But state law requires disclosure if you're at immediate risk of harming yourself or others, or in cases of child, elder or disability abuse. Ask your center to explain its rules at the first visit.

DAD NOTE You're already paying for it in your fees. Use it before things get bad, not after.

Full lesson: aptkeys.com/body/mental-health-basics/using-campus-counseling/

Checked October 2, 2026. Sources: National Institute of Mental Health; University of Maryland Counseling Center; University of Washington Counseling Center; UMass Amherst Center for Counseling and Psychological Health.