

Information for Parents, Faculty, Friends and Concerned Others

Services offered

The University Counseling Center (UCC) offers short-term individual, group, and couples therapy to undergraduate and graduate students who are enrolled full-time at the Reynolda Campus of Wake Forest University. Some common examples of concerns for which students seek help include depression, anxiety, adjustment/transition concerns, and relationship difficulties. In addition to therapy, staff members provide consultation to the university community and parents of WFU students. Referrals to the Learning Assistance Center, Student Health Service, and other campus and community resources are also provided to students in need of such services.

Due to the high demand for services, we do not provide long-term or intensive therapy services for clients. There are a number of excellent resources available in the community. In the event that long-term or intensive therapy or treatment is desired or indicated, we will provide referrals to community practitioners.

Signs of distress

Parents, faculty, friends, and Residence Life and Housing staff are often the first individuals to notice signs of distress in students. The following may indicate that a student is in distress and in need of help:

- Significant change in appearance (including hygiene, weight gain/loss), personality, attitude, mood, or behavior
- Impairment in academic, social, &/or job performance & functioning
- Change in sleep (oversleeping or insomnia)
- Change in appetite (eating too much or very little)
- Social withdrawal/isolation
- Irritability
- Increase in or frequent use of substances (alcohol and/or other drugs)
- Problems with concentration, energy and/or motivation
- Odd/bizarre speech or reasoning
- Aggressive, violent behavior or threats
- Attention-getting behavior
- Talk of/fascination with death or dying
- Feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, worthlessness, purposelessness
- Direct/indirect threats of harm to self

How you can help

Recognize the signs of distress noted above.

Communicate appropriately with your son or daughter. Encourage your son or daughter to share his/her concerns and problems with you. Share your concerns and observations with him/her, and give him/her permission to be honest and open with you about what is going on. Avoid judgmental, condescending, or minimizing statements (e.g., “You should be over that by now,” “That shouldn’t bother you,” etc.). Help your child understand that you are available for support.

The following suggestions are adapted from Cornell University’s Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) website

(<http://www.gannett.cornell.edu/for/parents/index.cfm>):

Let your son or daughter direct some of your conversations. Your student may be more willing or able to bring up concerns or problems if you are not always directing the conversation and/or asking questions such as what their grades are, how late they have been staying out, what their study habits are, etc.

Be specific about the plan for paying for your student’s tuition, fees, books, room, board, travel, recreation, and other expenses. If you are realistic and clear about your expectations at the outset, you may be able to avoid future misunderstandings.

Communicate realistic expectations about academic performance and achievement with your child. Most students who come to Wake Forest made excellent grades prior to coming to college. The transition to WFU can be difficult, however, and just because a student obtained straight A’s in high school does not necessarily mean that they should be making straight A’s in college, or that they need to make such grades in order to be successful at WFU or in their future careers. As a supportive parent, focus on your child’s development, well-being, and whether or not they are meeting their academic requirements, rather than their specific grades. Of course, if they are doing poorly due to emotional or environmental difficulties, it would be appropriate and important to express concern about this and help your student identify the correct resources to get the help they need in order to address those problems.

Encourage your student to take advantage of WFU’s various resources in order to obtain help when needed. There are multiple resources on the WFU campus to help students in need. They include the University Counseling Center, the Student Health Service (for medical needs, including psychiatric consultations), the Learning Assistance Center (for students having academic concerns, ADHD and/or disabilities), the Office of Multicultural Affairs (for academic advising and counseling support for all ethnic minority students), the Office of Personal and Career Development (for career exploration and development, internship

and job search strategies and postgraduate educational options), and the Office of the Chaplain (for religious and spiritual support). In addition, there are numerous resources available in Winston-Salem and the Piedmont Triad.

Confidentiality

State laws and the ethical guidelines of counseling professions require all information obtained in counseling sessions to be kept confidential. The UCC staff is committed to respecting and maintaining clients' confidentiality rights. Therefore, **please be advised that we may not provide parents, friends, faculty, or other individuals with information that we obtain in a counseling session**, including information about whether or not a student is a client of UCC or information concerning appointment dates and times. An exception can be made if the student willingly decides to sign a Release of Information form documenting the nature of information they consent/desire to be released and the parties to which the information is to be released.

Under certain circumstances, state law and ethical responsibilities require or permit exceptions to confidentiality. These circumstances include:

1. When a counselor believes that a client presents a threat of imminent danger to him/herself or anyone else. (In other words, the counselor believes that the life or safety of a client or identifiable third party is at risk.)
2. When the counselor obtains information pertaining to the abuse or neglect of a child or vulnerable adult. This includes situations involving past and present abuse, particularly if the alleged perpetrator of the abuse continues to be in a situation where they could potentially still be abusing children or vulnerable adults.
3. When disclosure is necessary due to legal proceedings/obligations.
4. As noted above, when a client willingly requests or consents for information to be released to a third party.

If you have information that you believe is important for your student's counselor to have (and are concerned that they do not have this information), you may share this information with a counselor at the counseling center. If we do not have consent to speak with you we will be unable to provide you with any information, but we can listen to your concerns. Also, if you choose to speak with a counselor, please be advised that we will not be able to withhold this information from your student.

Please note: The University Counseling Center does not initiate contact with students. If you believe that your student would benefit from counseling at UCC, you should encourage him or her to contact the University Counseling Center (336-758-5273) in order to obtain services.

Additional Resources

Although some of the resources below appear to be intended for parents of students who are just entering college, parents of college students in any class may find them helpful:

Getting Ready for College: How to Deal with the Separation

(<http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2001/08/24/backtoschool/main308005.shtml>)

This short CBS news article discusses preparing to send your student to college, signs of distress, and offers various tips for helping your student cope with stress.

Kadison, R., & DiGeronimo, T. (2004). *College of the overwhelmed: The campus mental health crisis and what to do about it*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

This highly-recommended book describes mental health problems on college campuses, the stresses that college students face, and ways that students commonly cope with problems. It provides suggestions to parents for helping their children cope with college life.

Understanding and Easing the Transition to College

(<http://www3.georgetown.edu/student-affairs/caps/parents/easingthetransition.html>)

This website includes information on what you and your child may experience as he/she enters college, as well as how you can support your child and yourself during the college experience.