

Your Rights as a Counselling Client

If you are receiving professional counselling services, **you have a right to expect and receive:**

- * knowledge about the Counsellor with whom you will be working. If you have a question about 'who' your counsellor is, his/her training, competence, experience, background, values, etc., please ask.
- * counselling from a professional who has acquired up-to-date training in mental health diagnostic and treatment principles and knowledge of counselling procedures, to at least a Master's level, from an accredited institution. Ethically counsellors must pursue on-going professional competence in the areas of knowledge, ability, experience, and judgement.
- * counselling practice of a high ethical standard, where the dignity and worth of each person is respected, free from discrimination.
- * service where the primary responsibility is to the client more than to those indirectly involved, except where the condition, nature or statements of the client present a clear and present danger to the welfare of others.
- * full and active participation in decisions which affect you, and freedom of choice based on open disclosure of relevant information. The client is the primary decision maker as to the direction of therapeutic undertaking. Clients have the right to accept or reject any task, exercise, or procedure suggested by the counsellor, and to be appraised of the rationale for, risks, benefits, and alternatives to any and all counselling interventions.
- * appropriate referral to other resources as needed, based on the counsellor's recognition of the limits of professional competence.
- * a counselling relationship free of dual roles where this might compromise the counsellor's objectivity or professional judgement.
- * the counsellor's personal needs or issues must not intrude into the counselling relationship at the expense of the client's needs.
- * be informed of the ethical and legal professional guidelines which counsellors must follow, especially if such issues will affect you

Information gathered

You are assured privacy regarding all content and records of counselling sessions. Written records are confidentially stored for seven years, and then shredded by the counsellor or by her successor. You have the right to view personal information about you e.g. notes and records arising from your counselling sessions. Verbal or written information arising from your counselling sessions will be released to a third party only with your written consent and full understanding of the implications. Rare exceptions to this assurance are 1) when the counsellor is legally and ethically bound to take reasonable steps to prevent imminent direct harm to yourself or another person where this might be reasonably suspected. 2) If counsellor's information and/or records are court ordered. 3) If a child may be in danger the counsellor is legally required to make a report to a Child Protection agency.

The Rights of the Counsellor

Within the counselling relationship, the counsellor has a right to:

- * refer a client to the best available resources if the client's issues exceed the counsellor's level of professional competence.
- * decline to commence or continue service if the client is also receiving counselling services from another practitioner without the informed consent of the initial service provider
- * decline to commence or continue service if in the counsellor's professional opinion the client is unable or unwilling at the present time to take reasonable actions to strive toward therapeutic goals
- * refer a client to the best available resources in the (rare) event of incompatible personal values held by the counsellor and the client.
- * expect the client to keep appointments, or make reasonable effort to provide cancellation notice at least 24 hours in advance. In the best interest of other students seeking counselling, clients who fail to provide such notice may lose their regular appointment time.
- * expect the client to be fully honest in their counselling disclosures. Counselling can only be effective if the client's disclosures are honest and complete.
- * wrap-up the counselling relationship if, in the counsellor's professional opinion, the presenting issues have been reasonably addressed. Successful counselling intervention can usually be achieved in one to eight sessions; more than eight sessions can be negotiated on an individual basis.

How to Complain or Problem-Solve

If you believe that a Counsellor has behaved unfairly, unethically or improperly, you are urged to bring it up with the Counsellor, if possible. Your Counsellor should hear you out and openly discuss the issue with you, without becoming defensive. Some problems are miscommunications or arise out of omission or ignorance; these may be best resolved by the people between whom the problem occurred.

Other issues may be more serious, or you may not feel comfortable with confronting a Counsellor with your concerns. In this case, you will want someone to serve as the middle ground, to facilitate problem-solving and ensure the problem is addressed. At Mount Allison, you can approach the Dean of Students, who is the administrative supervisor of the Counsellors. You may want to seek support from a student representative of the Students' Administrative Council (SAC). If you believe or wonder if you were harassed in a sexual or gender-based way, please consult with the Sexual Harassment Advisor.

You are urged to speak to someone if you have concerns about a Counsellor, or counselling services in general, and encourage others who state complaints or concerns to do the same. *Counselling is a valuable service to students only if it is a trustworthy service.* If you perceive a problem, we encourage you to raise your concern with those who can look into and address the issue.