

Services, Policies, and Informed Consent

Western Carolina University Counseling & Psychological Services provides consultations and short-term goal oriented psychological counseling to enrolled students at no cost. Clinicians at CAPS are dedicated to serving our students and assisting them in participating fully in their academic, social, and cultural endeavors at WCU. During your first meeting at CAPS, the counselor will provide a brief consultation about what brought you to CAPS. At the end of this meeting, you will learn about the services that would be most appropriate and how to access them. We are committed to assisting students and connecting them to services that use their motivation and strengths while also providing the necessary level of support and challenge. This often includes some independent self-guided work, group therapy, additional campus resources, individual counseling, or some combination of these options. You may also be given a referral for longer-term or specialized services from campus / community resources, too. If you run into problems accessing these services, please contact us so that we can provide further assistance.

Confidentiality

Communications with your counselor will be kept in confidence and will not, except under the circumstances explained below, be shared with anyone outside of CAPS unless you give us written authorization to do so. CAPS records are not part of academic records and no one on or off campus has access to CAPS records except as described below. We will disclose only the information that is necessary to the provision of services or operations, and the information will be disclosed only to those individuals who have a need to know.

Legal Exceptions to Confidentiality

- We may disclose confidential mental health information if there is a substantial risk of immediate danger to yourself or someone else, including a potential threat to campus.
- When we have reason to suspect that there is continued abuse or neglect of a minor, elder, or someone who is part of another vulnerable population we are legally required to report this to the Department of Social Services. We strive to include you in this conversation when possible.
- If a court of law orders the release of certain information about a client, we are legally required to comply with this order.
- We are permitted by state law to consult with other CAPS providers about your care. If your counselor is supervised by another CAPS clinician you will know the name of their supervisor
- We are permitted by state law to consult with providers in Health Services, our professional advisors including the university attorney and Student Concern Response Team, and to agencies or individuals that oversee our operations or that help us carry out our responsibilities in serving you. It is, however, our practice to inform you before any information is released to these parties.
- We also may disclose information to others involved in your care and treatment such as: (1) a health care provider who is providing emergency medical services to you; and (2) to other mental health professionals when necessary to coordinate your care.

Eligibility for Services

Any student who is enrolled for the current semester and paying the Health Services fee may access CAPS services at no cost. During the summer, students not enrolled for classes, but who are continuing enrollment in the fall semester, may pay a nominal fee for services. All students are eligible to participate in groups, workshops, and limited emergency services.

Short-Term Goal Oriented Counseling

CAPS provides short-term counseling services that are aimed at helping our students reach specific goals they set with their provider. Our counselors are trained to, and truly enjoy working with students with a variety of presenting concerns. Most of our appointments are every-other week as we find this works best with student's busy schedules and allows our counselors to see more students who are seeking care. We understand that some students need or want counseling more frequently than CAPS provides and we are happy to provide referrals to community resources that can meet these needs.

Counseling Platform

Our clinicians make every effort to see students in person when possible. CAPS does, however, offer services via our virtual platform, Zoom, if there are barriers to in-person care.

Treatment Recommendations

At the end of your first consultation about services, and throughout your engagement at CAPS, clinicians will recommend services and interventions that they believe will best assist you in addressing the concerns that brought you to CAPS. We ask that students follow

through with these recommendations and provide their counselor with feedback on the effectiveness of these recommendations and interventions. We know that these recommendations may sometimes feel uncomfortable, and we are here to support you in fully engaging in the counseling process. If you don't understand the recommendations your counselor provides, please ask them to help you know more about them.

Staff Consultations

In order to provide our clients with the best care all professional staff consult with one another when appropriate. These consultations are kept in the same confidence as all CAPS records and all staff are held to the same ethical standards of confidentiality. CAPS Senior Staff consult with or receive supervision from our Director and Associate Directors. Trainees receive clinical supervision from assigned Senior Staff. If you are working with a clinician who is under supervision, you have the right to know the name of their supervisor.

Emergency Services

All WCU students are eligible for emergency services. To access an on-call provider after-hours you may call the CAPS front desk (828)227-7469 and the prompts will guide you to connect to emergency services. You can expect to receive a follow-up call from CAPS the next business day after an emergency call after-hours.

Scheduling Issues

Since demand for services is typically high, we ask that you only schedule appointments that you are confident you will keep. If you are unable to keep an appointment, please call the CAPS receptionist as soon as possible, preferably 48 hours in advance, so that we may make the time slot available to another student. Repeated rescheduling, arriving more than 15 minutes late, and/or cancelling of appointments with (or without) advance notice will necessitate a meeting with the Clinical Director to discuss your continued treatment with CAPS. Please assist us in achieving maximum utilization of this important University resource.

Benefits and Risks of Counseling

Generally counseling has a positive impact on clients and their academic and personal goals. Benefits may include improved communication skills, better understanding of self and others, decreased depressive or anxiety symptoms, increased academic productivity, and better stress management skills. However, it is normal for clients to experience some temporary discomfort when addressing difficult issues, although most people generally feel better in the long term as a result of discussing these issues. Relationships may also be impacted by counseling as clients make changes which they feel are more effective for their own lives. Additionally, clients must be invested in counseling for full benefits to occur. Counseling is not primarily about a counselor providing advice, it is about a counselor helping the client explore and follow-through with the best solutions for themselves.

Recording of Sessions

Your counselor may ask your permission to record sessions in order to provide the most effective counseling possible, and to allow for feedback from fellow CAPS clinical staff and their supervisor. Recordings are used only for supervision and training and are handled with the highest level of confidentiality. Any recordings are deleted after they are reviewed in supervision. Recording sessions is voluntary and will never be done without your consent. You do not need to give permission for recording in order to receive counseling. Additionally, you may revoke permission, in writing, at any time.

Research and Evaluation

CAPS strives to improve services to students and to best accomplish this we conduct evaluations of services every semester. You may be asked to complete an evaluation form at some time. These surveys are anonymous and are for feedback purposes only. CAPS is also a participating member of the Center for Collegiate Mental Health (CCMH: cmh.psu.edu). You may be asked to participate in this project or others, all of which have met the stringent requirements of our WCU Institutional Research Board. Participation is completely voluntary and in no way impacts your eligibility or involvement in CAPS services.

Minors

Legally in the state of North Carolina, minors cannot be seen for ongoing mental health treatment at CAPS without the consent of their parents / legal guardians. In emergency situations CAPS will provide crisis intervention, but on-going services cannot be offered before consent is obtained. If you are under 18 and would like to pursue CAPS counseling services before your 18th birthday, please come to CAPS to pick up consent documentation for your parents/legal guardians to complete. You may also schedule a consultation appointment with a counselor to discuss your options, including campus and community resources.

Electronic & Cellular Communication

We do not conduct therapeutic conversations through e-mail and e-mail is not to be used in case of an emergency or urgent situation. We will ask you to provide us with an e-mail address; this will be used for scheduling purposes.. We ask that clients address all scheduling issues through the front desk, preferably in person or by phone. Please note, cell phone conversations cannot be guaranteed to be confidential.

Employer Request for Records

We do not release client information for employment/security. It is our position that meaningful consent cannot be assured when required as part of an employment screening.

Privacy & Security of Protected Health Information

All CAPS mental health records (electronic, audio-visual, and written) comply with federal and state legal statutes and professional practice standards (e.g. American Psychological Association) as they pertain to the recordkeeping of mental health services.