



STUDENT COUNSELING SERVICES

The University of Alabama at Birmingham

What to Expect from Counseling

Congratulations on your decision to pursue counseling; while no one can solve your problems for you, counselors help you learn to cope with life stressors effectively. In order to build a relationship and for treatment planning purposes, counselors spend the first several counseling sessions gathering biological, psychological, social, and spiritual information about you. So that your counselor knows how to help, it is necessary for you to identify your problems and/or needs.

If, at any time, you are having trouble identifying your problems or needs, it may be helpful to use/answer the following prompts.

I am seeking counseling because I want to learn how to _____.

I am seeking counseling because I don't know what to do about _____.

I am seeking counseling because I want a safe place to talk about _____.

I am seeking counseling because I want to change the way I _____.

Once you and your counselor identify presenting problems, you will discuss a plan of care. This may include prioritizing your needs, identifying external resources you may need, discussing specific models for treatment (and related risks and benefits), and/or establishing goals for treatment.

In follow up sessions, counselors are responsible for the **structure** of sessions; you are responsible for the **content** of sessions.

In session, and with respect to your needs and goals, it is your responsibility to:

1. Discuss behaviors, feelings, and thoughts
2. Discuss successes, challenges, and barriers
3. Discuss continued or changing needs or problems
4. Ask questions
5. Process assigned tasks or homework

In session, and with respect to your needs and goals, it is the counselor's responsibility to:

1. Teach skills
2. Design/assign therapeutic homework/tasks
3. Provide psychoeducation/answer relevant questions*
4. Guide you through specific therapeutic processes
5. Provide constructive and/or supportive feedback
6. Listen and ask follow-up questions
7. Challenge thought distortions that may be contributing to problems

*Note: While counselors may present options or assign tasks designed to facilitate therapeutic progress, counselors do not "give advice" or make decisions for you. They cannot answer the question, "What should I do?" for you.