

## **University of Sheffield Counselling Service**

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[www.sheffield.ac.uk/counselling/](http://www.sheffield.ac.uk/counselling/)

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# **What is Counselling and How Can it Help?**

## **Introduction**

In an English-speaking environment, it may not be easy for Chinese students to start a conversation and make friends with Westerners because of the language barrier. Chinese students may feel incompetent, isolated or left out in social activities. Coping with study is yet another stress for Chinese students who have to use English as a language in a new learning environment; attending and participating in tutorials, keeping up with course work, reading and writing essays can be very stressful.

Chinese students may feel lonely staying in a foreign country where their parents and friends seem a million miles away and where financial stress, adjustment to a new climate, culture, food and daily routine can be difficult and lonely.

The stress of adjusting to a new life studying overseas can lead to both physical and psychological symptoms. If you are experiencing any of the following difficulties we encourage you to seek medical advice and/or talk to someone at your university's counselling service:

## **Physical Problems**

- Change in sleeping pattern – unable to sleep or over sleeping
- Change in appetite – over eating or eat irregularly fatigue, headache
- Weight gain/lost
- Catch cold or flu frequently
- Diarrhoea or constipation

## **Psychological Problems**

- Feeling anxious
- Loss of concentration
- Feeling frustrated
- Feeling confused, a lost of control or sense of direction
- Not able to make a decision
- Feeling depressed
- Feeling helpless
- Lack of interest in social interaction
- Addicted to internet, gambling, drinking, smoking or eating
- Loss of temper, angry over minor issue

## 1. Problems come – what can be done?

As students in the UK, your university will offer you a variety of support services like Financial and Careers Advisors (see Other Kinds of Help below) but this leaflet explains what University Counselling Services are and how they may help you.

In the UK, this kind of help is considered very important for students that almost all Universities have their own Counselling Service. Many people in China (and Britain) may consider that going to someone other than a friend or family member for help is strange or means that they are very unwell. Increasingly however, counselling is being understood as one way of resolving difficulties about how we think and feel about ourselves, others and the world and a useful option for many different kinds of people. So what is counselling and how does it work?

## 2. What is Counselling?

Counsellors are trained professionals who learn the art of listening to and talking with people in a way that helps give them a new way of thinking about what is difficult for them. This may lead the person having counselling (called a “client”) to make new decisions or discover options they hadn’t noticed before. Counselling helps people know themselves better and help them to develop a new way to see and experience others and ourselves.

***However, my problems aren’t to do with me they are to do with practical concerns like money and studying.***

This may indeed be the case and your university will have practical assistance available as well as counselling for students (see other kinds of help). Sometimes, the pressure that practical problems like these have a great pressure on us, we may also develop other kinds of difficulties too, like feeling depressed and anxious, feeling physically unwell, not sleeping or sleeping too much or problems with food. Often we need to get some relief from these symptoms before we are able to get on the practical steps are needed to manage our debts or write our essays.

Counselling does not offer practical advice on managing debts, how to write an essay, nor tell you what to do about personal situations in your life. Think of them more as a guide than an advisor, one who is keen to understand you as an individual and then help you make sense of what is causing your difficulties. Very importantly, counsellors are not there to pass judgements or tell you your mistakes. Because counsellors are professionals outside your family and social circle, you do not have to consider their feelings or your obligations and responsibilities to them. They are there to help you.

***Shouldn’t a professional tell me what to do, they must have answers and be able to advise me?***

General speaking, a difference between Chinese and British culture is that there is less “distance” between teachers and students or professionals and the people who come for help. You may notice that Tutors are more likely to ask students about their own opinions in the UK than in China, this is simply a different model of teaching and learning, with its own merits and may need some times getting use to. In counselling, the counsellor will also be interested in your own belief and opinions.

Sometimes Counsellors will make practical suggestions and recommendations. Counsellors however, are trained to help you come to your own understandings about what is difficult. They do this through talking about your past and present circumstances and beliefs. Having studied how humans grow and develop, counsellors have a way of understanding how common problems get in the way of

this happening. Often people are thinking and feeling more confident and positive about themselves, after having counselling.

***Counselling is private and confidential.***

In the UK, there is a strong belief in the right of the individual to privacy. Counselling offer you an opportunity to talk to someone about problems that you feel you cannot tell those closest to you and know that this will be kept confidential.

***But won't tutors and academic staff know and this will give a bad impression of me or affect my marks?***

No. Counselling is strictly confidential other than in exceptional circumstances where your life is in danger and the counsellor may ask to talk with another professional like a Doctor on how best to help you. No other staff in the university will know you are receiving counselling, nor would your family or friends, unless you wanted to tell them.

Because people in the UK increasingly use counselling, often tutors may suggest students to see a counsellor that no offence is meant by this. They are not suggesting this because they think you are crazy or a bad student but because they will have seen that other students facing difficulties have been helped in this way with problems that they themselves are not trained to deal with.

***How long does counselling take?***

This often depends on the kinds of difficulties you are experiencing. It is better to go and see a counsellor early on when problems start, before they get to feel too big to manage. You have a right to ask your counsellor if they think they can help you and in what ways. Often University Counselling Services are quite busy and so there may be a wait to get an appointment and a limit to the number of sessions are offered. In the first session a counsellor will generally give you time to talk about what brings you to counselling and then discuss this with you in a way that will help you decide what you want to do from there. You may decide you would like to make further appointments to see a counsellor. Also, another support service may be suggested to you that the counsellor feels would be better able to help you. Alternatively, you may decide that you already feel clearer about a way forward and are happy to finish there, knowing you can come back and see them if you want to in the future.

### **3. Other Kinds of Help**

Along with counselling, British universities have other support services for students which include International Student Advisors, Financial advisors, Accommodation Advisors, Student Learning Support and Disability Support Officers. Sometimes these services are offered nearby the counselling service or may be in the same building. Often these departments are called "Student Services".

***Useful Information***

Every University will work slightly differently but usually in the UK, you can expect the following kinds of services:

- Student Finance/Money Advisors
- Study Skills Support
- International Student Officer
- Counselling Service
- Disability/Dyslexia Support Services
- Student Health Service

Often many of these services will be offered through departments called Student Services, but information about how to contact these departments should be included in your student guide /handbook.

The Student Union in your University will also be able to offer support and advice.

### **Other useful services:**

#### **Chinese Mental Health Association (CMHA)**

CMHA provides a range of services serving Chinese people who need support from psychological or mental health issue. Services are including an emotional support **Helpline Services** (08451228660 'local rate', Monday – Friday, 10:00 – 20:00)

**Counselling Services** (qualified, experienced and Chinese-speaking counsellor - Cantonese, Mandarin, and English).

**Email:** [wahsum@cmha.org.uk](mailto:wahsum@cmha.org.uk)

#### **International Student House (ISH)**

The ISH is a unique social, cultural and recreational centre in the heart of London – the ideal place to meet and make friends. It opens all year round and provides a wide programme of events. It welcomes students from all over the world, including Britain, which helps to make ISH truly multi-cultural and to promote their mission of peaceful and positive international relations.

**Contact Detail:**

**Address:** 229 Great Portland Street, Regent's Park, London, W1W 5PN

**Tel:** 020 7631 8300

**Fax:** 020 7631 8307

**Website:** [www.ish.org.uk](http://www.ish.org.uk)

#### **NHS Direct**

In this country, as a full-time overseas student you are entitled to have free consultation with medical doctors. Your university may have a medical centre, if not, to find the GP in your area, you can call NHS direct 24 hours a day, 7 days a week on 0845 4647 or visit [www.nhsdirect.org.uk](http://www.nhsdirect.org.uk) for advice. This 24 hours helpline also provide medical advice.

#### **Samaritans**

The Samaritans provide confidential emotional support 24/7 to those experiencing despair, distress or suicidal feelings. Contact can be done by phone, email, face to face and by other methods.

**Contact Detail:**

**Tel:** 0845 790 9090 (24 hrs helpline)

**Email:** [jo@samaritans.org](mailto:jo@samaritans.org)

**Website:** [www.samaritans.org](http://www.samaritans.org)

#### **GamCare**

GamCare has a commitment to promote responsible attitudes to gambling and to work for the provision of proper care for those who have been harmed by gambling dependency.

**Contact Detail:**

**Tel:** 0845 6000 133 (24 hrs helpline)

**Website:** [www.gamcare.org.uk](http://www.gamcare.org.uk)

#### **Family Planning Association (FPA)**

FPA is the UK's leading sexual health charity working to improve the sexual health of all people throughout the UK.

**Contact Detail:**

**Tel:** 0845 310 1334 (Monday to Friday, 9am to 6pm)

**Website:** [www.fpa.org.uk](http://www.fpa.org.uk)

#### **Frank**

Information and support for people who have drug or alcohol related issues.

**Contact Detail:**

**Tel:** 0800 77 66 00 (24 hrs helpline)

**Website:** [www.talktofrank.com](http://www.talktofrank.com)