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## **Purpose**

The information within this manual reflects the philosophy of Counseling Services and provides guidelines for various situations. The manual represents the most current version of policies and procedures endorsed by Middle Georgia State University Counseling Services. Policies and procedures within are subject to revision and expansion as needed, it is not possible to foresee every situation. The Counseling Services staff should use the manual as a *guideline* that supplements other University documents, such as but not limited to, the Faculty and Staff Handbook and the Student Code of Conduct. Counseling Service staff are expected to use good judgment in implementing these policies and procedures. In ambiguous and/or unprecedented situations, staff are expected to consult with supervisors and/or colleagues prior to making decisions. Every member of the Counseling Office is expected to be familiar with and have available current copies of pertinent University publications.

## **Section I: INTRODUCTION**

### *A. Middle Georgia State University*

#### 1. Mission Statement

Middle Georgia State University educates and graduates inspired, lifelong learners whose scholarship and careers enhance the region through professional leadership, innovative partnerships, and community engagement.

2.

1. Vision and Mission

The Office of Counseling and Accessibility Services has a dual mission:

1. To provide the professional and confidential support to students by addressing personal crises and offering remedies and referrals
2. To provide academic and non-academic support for students by addressing documented needs related to learning, physical, chronic health, and psychological issues.

2. Diversity Statement

At MGA Counseling Services, we value an environment that is welcoming and comfortable for all students regardless of race, gender, ethnic background, age, sexual orientation, religion, or disability. We strive to create a safe and affirming climate where students can feel comfortable exploring the importance of their identity and life experiences with regard to diversity and how this might relate to the questions and issues students would like to address in counseling. As professional clinicians, we continuously work to follow the multicultural guidelines and standards provided by guiding professional organizations, including the National Board of Certified Counselors, the Georgia Board of Professional Counselors, and the American Counseling Association.

## **Section II: PERSONNEL**

### *A. Professional Behaviors*

Middle Georgia State University Counseling Office staff members within clinical training programs practicing who are practicing at the CC, will demonstrate professional behaviors in all areas of personal interactions, duties, and responsibilities during their tenure at the Office.

1. Ethics, Confidentiality, and Privacy



The first step in conflict

response, within 1 business day, to a request for information and deems it unacceptable to have requests for information go unanswered.

Email communication is not a confidential form of communication. If used to communicate with students, email should be used minimally and ONLY with student's consent.

**Phone Usage:** Staff members should use phones in a manner consistent with best customer service standards and with assigned work or work-related activities.

## 6. Social Media

Counseling Office staff members who choose to participate in social media should assume all postings have the potential to be public material. Staff electing to use these platforms should be mindful of how this communication form might be perceived by current, past, or future students, colleagues, University administration, faculty/staff, and other community members. With this in mind, Counseling Office staff should consider limiting the amount of personal information posted on social media. Staff members with personal social networking sites should set privacy settings to the highest level of protection to prevent clients from accessing personal information or sending messages to the staff member. Clinicians must adhere to professional ethics concerning any posts, comments, videos, or other forms of communication by never including identifiable

the office during business hours should be answered promptly. All phone messages and email requests should be answered within 24 hours or the next business day if received on a weekend or holiday.

Greetings should be polite and accompanied by eye contact. For example, the question "How may I help you?" should be preceded with a standard greeting. "Good morning," or "Hello." Phone greetings when answering the central office line should include the name of the office and the name of the person answering the phone.

*B. Clinical Staff Responsibilities*

One of the primary responsibilities of the Counseling Office clinical staff is to provide counseling services to Middle Georgia State University (ay)TJ0 Tg-1 ( w)Jnd a3tClin (e)tpityrs

1. General Work Schedules

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### Section III: GENERAL OFFICE PROCEDURES

Regardless of campus, no Counseling Office staff should remove any confidential student information or records from the office. At the end of the workday, all confidential information should be placed in a secure area such as a locked cabinet or drawer behind a locked door.

#### A. *Macon Office - Office Procedures*

Below are the required steps to open/close the Macon Counseling Office. If all support staff is out of the office, the Director will follow the below procedures:

##### **Opening the office**

1. Unlock front waiting room door
2. Turn on inside lighting
3. Access key from the file room
4. Use keys to unlock file room door
5. Turn off Answering Service via phone

##### **Closing the office**

1. Reverse procedures from above.
2. Transfer phones to Answering Service

#### B. *Cochran Office - Office Procedures*

Below are steps for open/close of the Cochran Counseling Office. Support staff has primary responsibility with opening/closing the Office following business hours. When support staff is not able to do so, the first/last staff member to arrive in the office will follow the below procedures:

##### **Opening the office**

1. Unlock front waiting room door
2. Turn on inside lighting
3. Use keys to unlock file room door
4. Turn off Answering Service via phone

##### **Closing the office**

1. Reverse procedures from above
2. Transfer phones to Answering Service
3. Make sure all individual office doors are closed

### C. *Telephone, Fax, Mailboxes*

General incoming phone calls are received by counseling staff. The protocol for answering calls is:

- x Answer by greeting caller, “Good morning/afternoon, Middle Georgia State University Counseling Office, this is (your name), how may I help you?”
- x If scheduling, check to see if the desired individual is available using scheduling program.
- x If the caller requests a staff member, either transfer the call (see below) or take a message on orange message sheet and put the message in the individual's phone message box.

The front desk keeps all telephone messages. Each individual is responsible for checking and responding to messages promptly. Any telephone messages not retrieved by close of the business day will be placed in a locked area by support staff.

### D. *Emergency Preparedness Plans*

Middle Georgia State University Counseling Office follows the University Emergency Management Protocol. According to the protocol, a Knight Alert is sent to notify the campus community of any urgent situation including weather-related.

#### 1. Unexpected University Closures

At times, the University may unexpectedly need to close. Examples of such times include severe weather, power outages, a threat to campus, etc. With an unexpected closure, the Counseling Office will follow protocol and procedures as directed by the University. Knight Alerts will notify the Middle Georgia State University community of any closure to any campus or office. Further responsibilities are as follows:

Upon reopening the Office, All staff will respond to any messages received. B1 T149 BDC (w)22(0)100

- x Proceed to the designated MGA safe space until the warning has expired.
- x If possible and safe, staff within the Counseling Office should attempt to bring their cell



## Section IV: CLINICAL SERVICES

Middle Georgia State University Counseling Office operates as according to the Comprehensive Counseling Services Model, and provides short-term clinical services to address the mental health needs of students. The services provided by the Office are designed to help students manage day-to-day challenges, while also encouraging personal development.

### A. *Description of Services*

**Individual Counseling** - The Office offers individual counseling for a wide variety of psychological concerns with the most frequent being anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, stress, and relational issues.

**Group Counseling** – The Office h2 0 Td{o)-3 (f )TJ9.dx10 (w)2 (i)-(y, de)(ng)4 ( -10 (e)1 (rs)TJ0 (l)-2



### 3. Services without Eligibility Requirements

Any student can access Counseling Services drop-in workshops, outreach programming, resources within the Counseling Office website, and crisis intervention services.

#### C. *Scope and Conditions of Services*

The Office operates on a first-come/first serve basis. At times, the nature and severity of a presenting concern may necessitate the need for a new student to be scheduled before an existing student. Clinical judgment and consultation with other staff members should be utilized in making scheduling decisions. When schedules are full, the Office Coordinator will consult with each staff member about their scheduling preferences.

#### 1. Scope of Individual Therapy Practice

Students whose needs exceed the Office capacity to provide ethically competent care, as determined by treating clinician, should be referred to an appropriate setting/provider in the community.

Attendance in group therapy and/or drop-in workshops is unlimited.

#### 2. No Show/Cancellation Limits

Individual counseling services may be terminated if three (3) appointments are considered “No-Show” or there is an excessive number of appointment cancellations.

**Cancellations must be made at least 24 hours in advance. It is the client’s responsibility to reschedule any missed or cancelled appointments. Clients who miss more than 3 appointments per semester may lose eligibility for services. If you are more than 10 minutes late for an appointment, the Office reserves the right to reschedule your appointment.**

#### D. *Management of Caseload*

Each clinician is responsible for managing their caseload, which includes determining the frequency of appointments for each student. Frequency of sessions is determined by clinical presentation, consideration for session limits, and the availability of Office resources.



*E. Treatment Records*

Middle Georgia State University Counseling Services uses an electronic medical record system, Titanium, for scheduling, documentation and record keeping. Staff will be provided training in Titanium as needed. Additionally, the Titanium User Manual is available in the Counseling Office shared drive, or the Titanium Coordinator can be consulted for additional procedural needs.

Titanium is used to document all information relating to treatment, including each student interaction as well as any other type of contact/information pertaining to the student such as releases of information, records received from other providers, etc.

**Intake Report:** To be completed in Titanium **within one week** of the intake appointment. It is required that an intake report be included as part of every student's file along with their intake forms.

**Progress Note:** Progress Notes are a "type" of note – not a specific data form. All progress notes should include a summary of the session, therapist's observations, a brief mental status description, and notation pertaining to an assessment on risk/safety. These are to be completed in Titanium **within two working days** following the session.

A Progress note must be completed for each session provided past the intake. Identifying information for anyone other than the identified client should not be entered into a student's progress note. For example, if a student talks about their roommate, the roommate's full name should not be noted. A note may identify a referring professional or University employee.

The goals of progress notes are:

- x To document student client concerns and progress,
- x To facilitate clear communication between multiple treatment providers
- x To enhance treatment consistency across time and multiple treatment providers.

Progress notes should be concise, clear, and pertinent. The depth and format of progress notes are at the discretion of the individual clinician and immediate supervisor.

**Screening Note:** The Screening Note form should be utilized to document brief screening/triage sessions. These should be completed within **2 working days** of the screening session.

**Group Therapy Notes:** To be completed in Titanium **within 2 working days** following the group session. Group notes should not contain any one member's name, rather should be kept to a summary of the group session. The group therapy note can then be distributed via EMR to all group session attendees.

**Group Screening:** Referrals to a group may be made at any time by consulting with the group facilitator. Group facilitators are responsible for following up on referrals, scheduling group screenings in Titanium, and notifying the referring clinician of the outcome. Each semester, membership in groups is examined, and new members may be added. Group attendance can be monitored via Titanium.

**Closing Summary:** When a student has completed/discontinued treatment, the file will be closed within a reasonable period. A closing summary is completed, and the student is deactivated from the Titanium client list for that clinician.

If a student does not return for services, any follow-up attempts should be noted in the file. If the student does not respond to follow-up attempts, the student's file can be closed, and above steps followed.



## 2. Screening Procedures

Initial Appointment: During the first appointment, clients will meet with a counselor to discuss the problem that led to seeking counseling and to provide personal history and background information. Initial appointments are 30 minutes in length. At the conclusion of the initial meeting, treatment options will be discussed, including whether or not counseling needs may be better met by an off campus counselor or physician. If counseling with MGA Counseling Services is appropriate, future appointments may or may not be with the same counselor depending on scheduling and the nature of the treatment issues.

## 3. Referral Procedures

It is important to remember that providing an initial assessment, forming a clinical decision, and making a referral *is the provision* of service, *not the refusal* of service.

After the initial assessment, the clinician may clinically determine to refer a student to an outside resource or provider based on eligibility (refer to Section IV. B.)

Possible reasons for referral to an external resource could include (but are not limited to):

- x Student's treatment needs are beyond the scope of practice available at Counseling office, either by virtue of presenting concern, or frequency with which the student needs to be seen.
- x Student's non-compliance with the proposed treatment plan (e.g., refusal to provide consent for treatment)
- x Access to services with another provider is likely to have a shorter wait period (e.g., psychiatric services)
- x Student is seeking services not provided by the Office (e.g., testing for a learning disability, evaluation for ADHD)
- x Student is seeking mandated services for conduct, legal or other purposes (e.g., court-ordered treatment, forensic evaluation, child custody evaluation)

### *Referrals for Emotional Support Animal:*

It is the policy of the Middle Georgia State University Counseling Services that clinicians do not provide documentation supporting the mental health need for an Emotional Support Animal (ESA). No current mental health association has legally defined ESA, nor the conditions for which an ESA is recommended/appropriate. Additionally, in March 2019, the American Counseling Association (ACA) published the Human Animal Interventions in Counseling (HAIC) position statement (see Appendix A) on ESAs whereby professional counselors are recommended not to engage in the practice of writing for ESAs unless the counselor has specialized training and experience in working with human-animal bond in counseling. Students seeking ESA documentation may be provided a community referral list noting providers who may be willing to assess and



provide such documentation. The referral list may be provided through a case management appointment or by office staff. The Office Coordinator may have a list of local clinicians who provide ESA documentation.

#### 4. Psychiatric Medication Procedures

At times, students may present who could benefit from psychotropic medication. These students will be referred to Be Well, (Christie Campus).

#### 5. Crisis Debriefing Procedures

At times, traumatic events may occur on the Middle Georgia State Campuses that impact groups of individuals, rather than just one individual. During times such as these, Counseling Services staff will respond to requests for crisis debriefing sessions at locations in addition to the Office. All such requests should be directed to the Director of Counseling Services. The Director will coordinate with the University member(s) who is requesting the debriefing to determine a time, place, and number of mental health professionals necessary for the debriefing(s). It is expected that during times of crises on campus, all Counseling clinicians will work cooperatively with the Director to fulfill these requests.

#### 6. Release of Information Procedures

When there is a request for the release of any student information, it is necessary to obtain written consent to release information to the student in question. A Release of Information (ROI) form can be found at the front desk or may be kept in the clinician's office. The completed form is scanned into the student's Titanium file then shredded.

*Discharge Summaries:* At times, a student may be discharged from Counseling services to seek care with another provider, agency, or hospital. The new provider may seek a request for records. The clinician, in collaboration with the Director, will manage all discharge summary requests for student records.

*Missed Class Note:* Counseling Services will not issue notes for a class missed due to an attended counseling appointment. Students may use their appointment card as evidence of their appointment, should they so

choose. However, responsibility for

Call: 478.988.1002

**Houston Healthcare System**

Call: 478.922.4281

In cases where Counseling Services cannot be reached, please call the **Georgia Crisis and Access Line (GCAL)** at 1-800-715-4225 and notify Student Affairs at 478-757-7383.

i.

GCAL will contact the appropriate emergency response.

In all cases, MGA ACT will follow up with all students.

This protocol will be minimally reviewed on an annual basis by members of the MGA Assessment and Care Team.

### 3. Sexual Assault Crisis Intervention

Sexual assault victims tend to present for crisis counseling either (a) immediately following the assault or (b) several days/weeks/ months after the assault occurred. The approach employed by the therapist may differ depending on this timeline.

Keep in mind that the primary role in this process is to provide *psychological* support. Although it is imperative to advocate with others for the victim's rights, it is also crucial for the victim to not feel pressured to take specific actions. Follow the below guidelines:

- x Provide overt messages of support and affirmation
- x Allow some catharsis to relieve emotional pressure but carefully monitor forego strength and reality testing during this process
- x Conduct a mental status examination
- x Assess for suicidal ideation, intent, plan, and homicidal ideation
- x Provide information regarding victim resources and answer questions clearly (provide orally and provide the same information in a written format for referencing), including the following:
  - SANE exam (see above)
  - Health Services
  - University Police, notify the victim that filing a police report is NOT mandatory
  - Title IX
  - Local Rape Crisis Centers
  - Victim Assistance office, located in District Attorney's office.
- x Establish a follow-up care plan during your first meeting. Provide emergency numbers for use include support network in the plan, if appropriate.

#### I. *Medical Withdrawals*

All requests for Medical Withdrawals from Middle Georgia State University, regardless of student's campus of record, are made to the Medical Withdrawal Committee. Once reviewed, students will be notified of the decision regarding their request.

Medical Withdrawal decisions are based on whether the Letter of Request and supporting documentation demonstrate the student's stated medical condition significantly impaired their ability to function at the student's standard level, and that with treatment, the impairment can be expected to end. Such conditions might include flare-up of chronic illness, substance abuse, suicidality/depression, and other mental health concerns for which the student is unable to remain in school. If all documentation has not been received by that deadline, students will have to apply to the Provost for a "Change of Grade" to a withdrawal.

## **Section V: SUPERVISION**

### *A. Professional Staff Supervision*

All staff members are assigned to a campus, Macon or Cochran, and are under the

## **Appendix A - ACA ESA position statement**

Refer to the next five pages.



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Human Animal Interventions in  
Counseling Interest Network

# **Emotional Support Animals**

*Human Animal*

therapeutic human-animal interactions before writing such a letter. The ACA's Code of Ethics C.2.e Consultations on Ethical Obligations includes "taking reasonable steps with other counselors, the ACA Ethics and Professional Standards Department, or related professionals when they have questions regarding their ethical obligations or professional practice." This may include working with animal trainers, behaviorists, or veterinary behaviorists to ensure that the clinician remains within their scope of practice. Since there is no overarching licensing or accrediting body for this matter, nor are there federal or state mandates at this time, the onus is on the clinician to ensure ethical practice. As such, this document will define an ESA and provide current policies and protocols surrounding the inclusion of ESAs. This document is not an exhaustive list, but will provide the minimum information required to make a decision to write a letter.

## **RISKS**

When considering writing a letter for an ESA, the counselor must be aware of inherent risks to the clinician, animal and client, as well as the public who will encounter such animals. All Service, Emotional Support, and Therapy animals must meet current state, local, and federal laws and policies regarding vaccinations and county licensing/registration, as would any other companion animal. Expenses and other considerations associated with such compliance are the responsibility of the animal's owner/handler, and financial or other access barriers do not exempt the owner from this legal responsibility. Specific potential risks to animals, client(,)2 ( c)6 (r)5 ( a5)3 ( )10 (not)

**Risks to the Public**

- " Injury or emotional damage from inadequately trained animal
- " Untrained or unsocialized animals may be more likely to be stressed or aggressive in public
- " Unsocialized animals may be disruptive and interfere with normal activities
- " Maladaptive interactions with other animals (especially toward service animals)
- " Zoonotic infection or disease from animal
- o " ~~more~~ ~~contributes~~ ~~to~~ ~~public~~ ~~skepticism~~ ~~which~~ ~~hurts~~ ~~those~~ ~~with~~ ~~valid~~ ~~helper~~ ~~animals~~
- " Contributes to public skepticism, which hurts those with valid helper animals
- " The more unsuitable the animal, the greater the risk (i.e. exotic pet, undomesticated/wild animal)
- " When more ~~fr~~ ~~an~~ ~~is~~ ~~at~~ ~~the~~ ~~same~~ ~~time~~ ~~as~~ ~~the~~ ~~number~~ ~~of~~ ~~animals~~ ~~increases~~

## **ABOUT ESAs**

### **HOW DOES AN ANIMAL BECOME AN ESA**

At this time, the ONLY way for an animal to be appropriately documented as an ESA is a letter from a licensed healthcare or human service provider stating that the animal is necessary for the individual's treatment. Because ESAs are not intended to have public access or accompany individuals in public contexts, no additional training or suitability screening is required. While this lack of preparation and evaluation is appropriate for individuals living with ESAs in their homes, it can become problematic when unprepared animals and handlers engage in the highly stressful, cramped, and unpredictable contexts associated with airline travel.

### **FRAUDULENT ESA DOCUMENTATION**

- " As described above, the ONLY way to document an ESA as such is through the healthcare or human service provider's letter
- " The ADA and DOJ do not currently recognize **any** form of certificate, identification card, vest, or tag as proof of an animal's designation as a service animal OR and emotional support animal. ALL of these items may be considered fraudulent, regardless of the claims asserted on the 'documentation' items.
- " For purchase online "registration" and "certification" documentation is fraudulent and does not constitute appropriate documentation of any type of helper animal
- " Vests, identification tags, and identification cards are not required of service animals, although some handlers choose to use a vest to discourage others from approaching or distracting the service dog

### **POLICIES SPECIFIC TO ESAs**

Individuals with disabilities may request reasonable accommodations for an ESA under the following Acts.

#### **FAIR HOUSING ACT**

[Fair Housing Act, Section 504](#)<sup>1</sup>

#### **AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT**

[Americans with Disabilities Act](#)<sup>2</sup>

#### **AIRLINE CARRIER ACT**

[The Air Carrier Access Act \(49 U.S.C. 14141-14142\)](#)<sup>3</sup>

**All authors are members of the HAIC Interest Network Steering Committee.**

**Acknowledgement of Authors:**

Leslie Stewart, PhD, LPC

Amy Johnson, MA, MAT, LPC, CPDT-KA

Carlene Taylor, EdD, LMHC-S, LPC

Laura Bruneau, PhD, LPC

Connie Couch, MEd, LPC

Erica Schlau, PhD, LPC

Jade Letourneau, PhD, LPC

Katy Schroeder, PhD, NCC, PATH,

## Appendix B - Common Titanium Terms

Clinical Codes	Listing	Definition
	Consultation w/ Note	

A couple's appointment with the case manager to access resources
Code used for Group Therapy. Be sure to create a group sign-up sheet and update it for member attendance.
Ditto Personal Intake.
Ditto Ongoing: Personal, but for couples' therapy.
Ditto Screening: when multiple students/people come in on triage and want to be seen together.
Used for Drop-in mental health workshops that are scheduled throughout the semester, i.e. Emotional Wisdom, Mindful Yoga, etc. Be sure to update the additional information tab with # of attendees, etc. To be used by Asst. Director alone for time spent in duties related to br0 11ofor

	General Administration	For all work-related activities not otherwise accounted for.
	Inservice	To be used when an outside speaker makes a presentation to the CC staff
	Job Candidate Activity	Should be used for all time spent in activities associated with filling a counseling office position: application review, search committee meetings, phone & on-site interviews, etc.
	Outreach	Used for providing any programming to campus/community groups. Ensure that Additional information tab is completed after the outreach. Type of presentation is either: workshop (recurring curriculum, e.g. Safe Space, QPR, RAD), presentation, or informational (passive outreach)
	Paperwork	To be used primarily by trainees. Staff should utilize the General Administration code
	Professional Development	To be used when staff is out of office attending a professional development activity other than a conference.
	Staff Meeting	Used to code weekly 2-hour staff meeting
	Student Affairs Activity	Used to code participation in any Student Affairs activity not otherwise noted (outreach, committee)
	Supervision Provided: Intern	Self-explanatory
	Sup. Prov.: Practicum...	
	Sup Prov: Staff	Clinical supervision provided to staff toward staff member's licensure requirements
	Supervision Received	Any type of supervision received
	Training Program Administration	To be used by DOT, Prac. Co., or Field Exp Co. for time spent in preparing/planning/administrating the relevant training program.
	Training Provided: Interns	Self-explanatory
	Training Provided: Practicum	