

What is Counseling?

Deerfield Academy Counseling Center

We are glad that you are considering meeting with a Deerfield Academy counselor! We also appreciate that you are taking the time to read this page so that you are as informed as possible about what it means to be in counseling at Deerfield. And if you have any further questions or concerns after reading this page, please don't hesitate to ask a counselor.

Counseling Services

Counseling is difficult to broadly describe. Generally speaking, however, counseling is similar to psychotherapy in that you will work with a counselor to build skills and insight and find solutions to problems through conversation and practice. What exactly happens in any given session will vary depending on your goals, presenting problem(s), comfort with communication, current life circumstances, and the general approach you've agreed to with your counselor. All three Deerfield counselors are independently licensed clinicians who are highly trained and experienced in the field, and whomever you work with will do their best to address your presenting concerns and collaborate with you in order to tailor the work to your personality and needs.

As with many meaningful pursuits, counseling can have benefits and risks. Since it sometimes involves discussing challenging or previously undisclosed aspects of your life, you may experience some occasional uncomfortable feelings. On the other hand, counseling has been empirically demonstrated to have benefits for people who go through it; it often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. It is also often crucial to the management of clinical psychiatric diagnoses while in an academic setting like Deerfield Academy. We feel confident that the services we provide make a positive impact in the lives of the students who take part. If, however, you find that it is not working for you, you are of course free to discontinue at any point. We will also do our best to accommodate requests for a change of counselor if you feel you would be better served by a different provider.

Typically, our first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of this assessment, we will be able to offer you some first impressions of your situation as well as a rough outline of a plan for us to follow moving forward should you decide to continue with counseling. Typical arrangements usually include meeting regularly – be it weekly, every other week, monthly, etc. – for a defined period of time as you work toward reaching your goals.

Appointments

The counseling staff schedules sessions Monday through Friday, 8:30am-5:00pm, and sessions are typically 45 minutes long. We ask that you do your best to provide at least 24 hours' notice if you need to cancel an appointment (though we also understand that that is not always possible).

Cost

The cost of all counseling sessions at Deerfield Academy is fully covered by tuition and fees. We do not bill insurance.

Consent

All Deerfield Academy parents/guardians with sole or joint legal custody provide consent for their children to access Counseling Center services via Health Services paperwork that is completed on an annual basis. We also seek to obtain each student's informed verbal consent by discussing the limits of confidentiality and other related topics in your first session and encouraging you to read this document prior to consenting to counseling.

One risk of counseling with a minor involves disagreement among parents/guardians and/or disagreement between parents/guardians and the counselor regarding the child's treatment. If

such disagreements occur, our counselors will strive to listen carefully so that we can understand the guardian(s)'s perspectives, and we will do our best to fully explain our own perspective as well. We can resolve such disagreements or we can agree to disagree, but our utmost priority will always be the student's progress in counseling. If a parent/guardian believes that the counseling of a student should end, we will honor that decision unless there are extraordinary circumstances (and in most cases we will ask that you allow us the ability to have a few closing sessions with your child to appropriately end the treatment relationship).

Though we always strive for consent and transparency with parents, in Massachusetts the "mature minor rule" states that a child may confidentially consent to their own treatment if (1) the child is mature enough and able to give informed consent, and (2) it is in the best interests of the minor not to notify the child's parents. Under such rare instances, a Deerfield Academy student may enter into and/or remain in counseling without parental awareness or consent.

Confidentiality

The Deerfield Academy Counseling Center believes strongly that confidentiality is critical to providing good treatment. In order for people to fully engage in counseling, they need to trust that they can share thoughts, feelings, and experiences without worrying that that information will be shared with others. For this reason, we do our absolute best to safeguard the privacy of the students we meet with. In most cases, the only people who know a student is in counseling will be those that the student chooses to inform on their own.

If a parent/guardian contacts the Counseling Center, we will acknowledge whether or not their child is being seen by a counselor. We may also describe how the student is doing in general terms, but the specific details and content of the counseling conversations will be kept private (unless disclosure is specifically agreed to by the student). This includes counselors' knowledge of activities and behaviors that a parent/guardian may not approve of – or might be upset by – but that do not put the student at risk of serious and immediate harm. However, if it is determined that a student's behavior is putting their wellbeing at significant risk or is substantially impacting their functioning, then we will communicate this information to parents/guardians and make every effort to incorporate the student's involvement in this disclosure.

If asked by a Dean, Advisor, or other concerned faculty member, we will acknowledge whether or not a student is being seen by a counselor if it is determined that that faculty member has a need to know, while ensuring that all specific health-related information about the student will be kept confidential. Additionally, the counselors work closely with Health Center staff, including the Medical Director, Nurse Practitioner, and nurses, and will occasionally exchange information about students on a need-to-know basis for the sake of providing appropriate and comprehensive medical care. In any and all instances like this, your counselor will do their best to inform the student.

Exceptions to confidentiality:

If a student's functioning or wellbeing is significantly compromised, a counselor may determine that a parent/guardian needs to be informed. This is not a decision that we would ever consider lightly, and in such instances, we will do everything within our power to notify you (the student) in advance and collaborate with you on how best to approach the situation.

Confidentiality/privacy cannot be maintained when:

- A student reveals that they plan to cause serious harm or death to themselves, and we believe they have the intent and ability to carry out this threat within a proximate timeframe. In this instance we are required by law to take steps to inform a parent or guardian as well as individuals at the Academy with a need to know of what the student

has told us and how serious we believe this threat to be and to try to prevent the occurrence of such harm.

- A student reveals a credible plan to cause serious harm or death to someone else, and we believe they have the intent and ability to carry out this threat in the very near future. In this situation, we are required by law to inform a parent or guardian and individuals at the Academy with a need to know. We are also required to inform the police and potentially the person who is the target of the threatened harm.
- A student is actively engaging in behaviors that could cause serious harm to them or someone else, even if they do not intend to harm themselves or another person. In these situations, we will consult as a team of health providers in order to use our professional judgment to determine whether a parent or guardian and/or individuals at the Academy with a need to know must be informed.
- It is revealed or apparent that a child is being neglected or abused – physically, sexually or emotionally – or has been neglected or abused in the past. We are required by law to report the alleged abuse to the appropriate state child-protective agency.
- If a student reveals that they have been a victim of sexual assault, we MAY be required to report that information to authorities, depending on the relevant laws in the student’s state of residence (these laws vary widely from state to state; we will be happy to determine the statutes in your state if you’d like more information about this).
- We are ordered by a court to disclose information.

If you have concerns about the limits of confidentiality, you can always ask your counselor questions about the types of information we would need to disclose. You can ask in the form of “hypothetical situations,” such as: “If a child told you that he or she were doing _____, would you tell the parents?”

Contacting Us

Email is typically the best way to contact your counselor, though you should be aware that your email might not be read before the following day. To schedule a first appointment, you can either reach out to a specific counselor directly or email counseling@deerfield.edu.

If you are experiencing a mental health emergency, please DO NOT use email to relay your situation; instead, please contact Security (413-772-9880) or the Health Center (413-774-1600), and the counselor on call will be contacted in order to provide crisis support.

In Conclusion...

To reiterate, we are happy that you are considering counseling at Deerfield. We know it to be a valuable resource that is accessed by many students during their time at DA. We hope that this document has helped to provide some basic information about counseling, and we look forward to following up with you in person!