

# What can my school counselor really do for me ??

Overwhelmed by classwork? Scared because your parents are splitting up? Worried about a friend? Feel like you don't fit in?

Sometimes it's just not possible to sort through tough times alone. Problems can build up and you may lose sleep, find you can't concentrate on homework, or even become depressed. When you need to talk to someone, your school counselor (sometimes called a guidance counselor) can be a great place to start.

## Counselors Help You Cope

School counselors know how to listen and help. They'll take your problem seriously and work with you to find a good solution. School counselors are trained to help with everything - and it doesn't have to be just school stuff. A counselor can help you deal with the sadness when someone has died as well as advise you on taking the right classes to get into your dream college.

It takes a lot of training to be a school counselor. Most not only have college degrees but also master's degrees, as well as special training and certification in counseling. One of the many good things about school counselors is that they are up-to-date on all the top things that affect students, including what's going on in the country and any trends that may affect your school.

School counselors can give you all sorts of tips and support on solving problems and making good decisions. Chances are, whatever problem you have, your counselor has seen it before - and has lots of good advice on how to help you work through it. Counselors can give you tips on standing up for yourself if you're being bullied, managing stress, talking to your parents, and dealing with anger and other difficult moods. Counselors can also advise you on problems you may have with a teacher, such as communication difficulties or questions over grades.

## How Do I See the Counselor?

It's probably a good idea to visit your counselor and get to know him or her even if you don't have a problem. This helps you feel comfortable with the counselor in case you ever do need to see her in a time of crisis. It's usually easier to talk about a tough issue or a problem when you already feel comfortable with the counselor. Meeting your counselor when you're not in

the middle of a crisis also gives you a chance to discuss such issues as what the counselor will keep confidential and how he or she works with a student to resolve a problem.

## **Student-Counselor Meetings**

You don't need to know exactly what's bothering you when you talk with the school counselor. It's perfectly OK just to make an appointment because you're feeling bad or not doing as well in school as you'd like. It's the school counselor's job to help people figure out what's going on. In fact, it's often better to see your counselor as soon as you know something's up, even if you don't know what the trouble is. Chances are you'll be able to solve a problem faster when you have the skill and resources of the counselor behind you.

Counselors also sometimes meet students in groups. Group meetings can really help people who are dealing with similar issues, such as a divorce. In these group settings, people can share their feelings and learn coping skills. Not only do you get great ideas in a group setting, but it can also help to know that other people are going through the same thing and that they understand.

## **How Confidential Is It?**

When you meet privately with a school counselor, your conversation will most likely be confidential. The counselor isn't going to go blabbing your business around school. Different schools have different policies, though. So talk directly with your counselor about what he or she considers confidential.

In very rare cases, a counselor is unable to keep information confidential. If the counselor thinks that you or someone else is at risk of being harmed, he or she is required by law to share that information. Even in these rare cases, the counselor will share that information only with the people who need to know.

People sometimes worry that other students will think they're seeing the counselor because they have major problems or they're in trouble. But in most schools the counselor deals with lots of school issues - as well as personal ones. Your friends and classmates don't need to know why you're seeing the counselor unless you choose to tell them.

Your school counselor is someone who is separate from your life - a neutral adult who isn't a parent, relative, or teacher. Your school counselor isn't a therapist. (So if you see your counselor, it's not the same as getting therapy.) If you need help in some way that the school counselor can't provide, he or she will provide information about other resources that will give you what you need, such as the name of a therapist.

**No matter what your problem, try to think of the counselor as someone who's on your side.** Even if you've had a bad experience in the past with another counselor or a private therapist, don't hesitate to contact your school counselor - or talk to the counseling office about seeing someone else if you don't click with your current counselor. Every counselor is different, and most understand that it's natural for people to be more comfortable with some individuals than others.

Don't be surprised if your parents know your school counselor. They may even be in touch with him or her. Sometimes counselors offer workshops for parents, with or without their kids, about topics such as study skills or preventing drug abuse. It's good for the counselor and your parents to know each other when everything is going OK. That way, if any problems come up - like if you're being bullied or there's a death in the family and you have to be out of school - they'll be able to work together comfortably.

If you're seeing your counselor and your parents don't know about it, don't worry that the counselor will talk to them about your meetings. Unless you've given the counselor the feeling that you may harm yourself or others, what's said in your meetings will stay just between you and the counselor.

School counselors are all about helping to make your school experience the best it can be. The role of the school counselor today is very different from what it was like when your parents were in school. Instead of just focusing on schoolwork and careers, today's counselors are there for students in a broader way. They help students handle almost any problem that might get in the way of learning, guide students to productive futures, and try to create a positive environment for everyone at school. **So if you need a counselor's advice, just ask!**