

Information for Students about Tele-Mental Health Services

St. Olaf College Counseling Center

We are pleased to have the opportunity to serve you. The St. Olaf College Counseling Center provides confidential mental health counseling support for all currently enrolled students. The Counseling Center offers distance counseling via telephone or videoconferencing to currently enrolled students who meet the eligibility criteria for this service. (Please see the Counseling Center homepage for eligibility criteria during the summer.) The student must be physically located in Minnesota at the time of their counseling appointment(s), or your counselor has received permission to provide tele-mental health services from your home state.

Scope of Service

The Counseling Center will be providing a limited scope of service, as our counselors will be working from home. If it is determined that your needs exceed the scope of service or expertise available at the Counseling Center, or that your needs cannot be adequately met by participating in tele-mental health counseling, we will assist you in identifying an appropriate referral to meet your needs.

Limits of Tele-Mental Health Services

Distance counseling should not be viewed as a substitute for face-to-face counseling. It is an alternative form of counseling with some differences from traditional counseling. For example:

- Due to the use of technology, video counseling may have disruptions in service and quality of service.
- If you are having suicidal or homicidal thoughts, acute psychosis, or physical complications from an eating disorder, tele-mental health services may not be appropriate for your needs. In this case, you may be referred to in-person local mental health resources in your community.

What to Expect Before You Begin Tele-Mental Health Services

Prior to beginning distance counseling,

- You will be provided with intake forms to complete (online). You will need to sign and return the forms prior to your first tele-mental health counseling appointment.
- You will be required to provide your contact information; information for at least one emergency contact in your location; emergency resources in your current location.
- Our tele-mental health counseling sessions are held via Zoom and your counselor will email you a link prior to your scheduled appointment. You be required to provide a phone number at which to reach you, given the possibility of video conferencing disruption.

What to Expect in Your First Tele-Mental Health Appointment

- All initial tele-mental health counseling appointments will be held via videoconferencing (Zoom). If a student prefers, subsequent appointments may be held by phone, if agreed upon by your counselor.
- If using Zoom, it is recommended you sign on to your account at least five minutes prior to your appointment start time. You must initiate the connection at the time of your appointment by clicking the link provided by your counselor.

- If using the phone, your counselor will call you at the time of your appointment using the phone number you provided. The call will show up as a private number.
- In your first tele-mental health appointment, your counselor will begin by reviewing the informed consent forms you filled out, and then address your presenting concerns.

Emergency Management for Distance Counseling

In the event of an emergency, and for your safety, the following measures are important and necessary.

- Your counselor will need to know your location/address at the time the counseling session occurs, and will need to know if this location changes.
- Your counselor will need to have you identify someone whom you trust, to give your counselor permission to contact should a situation occur that your counselor believes you to be at risk. You will verify that this emergency contact person is able and willing to go to your location in the event of an emergency, and if your counselor deems necessary, call 911 and/or transport you to a local hospital.

Backup Plan in Case of Technology Failure

- The most reliable backup to Zoom is a phone. Therefore, it is recommended you always have your phone available, and that you provide your counselor with your phone number.
- If you get disconnected from a videoconferencing session, restart the session. If you are unable to reconnect within a few minutes, your counselor will call you at the number you provided.

What Happens When You Don't "Show" for Your Appointment

- Videoconferencing: We will send you an email with a link to join the video conference at the scheduled appointment time. If you do not respond at the scheduled appointment time, your counselor will attempt to contact you by phone. If you did not answer the phone call, your counselor will leave a brief message.
- Phone: Your counselor will initiate the call at the scheduled appointment time. The call will show up as a private number. If you do not answer, your counselor will leave a brief message.