Dear Alice,

I don't have what would qualify for legitimate reason to go to the campus counseling center. Is this service typically only for medical related problems? I just want to be able to talk to someone about some of my problems right now. I feel like I "know" the answer to all my questions (regarding time management, developing healthy eating and sleeping habits, confusion, signs of depression, life management etc., etc.). However, I thought it would be helpful to talk to a professional that would help me talk through some of things I'm thinking about. Who can I see?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Wanting to talk with a professional about any of the things you mentioned - time management, healthy eating and sleeping habits, and hints of depression - is a completely appropriate reason to seek out counseling. Many people wait until they are in a crisis situation to seek help, but it's wise to talk with someone about concerns as they arise, before they reach emergency status, and to learn behaviors that will help you function in healthy and efficient ways. Working with a professional is a great way to keep healthy, happy, and knowledgeable about your inner workings.

Dealing with anything from finding balance in your busy day-to-day doings to getting treatment for psychological conditions certainly warrants assistance from an expert. The issues you describe are common starting points for many people in counseling. Other people start therapy after noticing a symptom; mental disorders and disturbances often manifest themselves as unwanted behaviors (such as repeated hand washing), feelings (despair), thoughts (obsessing about a relationship), or physiological reactions (racing heart). Whether or not you think you've had any symptoms, talking with a professional is a great way to manage the multitude of demands that often come up for students and to keep yourself healthy.

It may also be tempting to try to figure it out on your own. However, just as you've suspected, consulting with someone who can help you objectively look at the factors that may be causing you distress can be beneficial. S/he may help you identify issues or patterns that you may not have been able to previously see or realize and identifying those will help you inform changes in your life. Ultimately, the goal of seeking help with these issues is to help you cope...
in a healthy way and function better in the future? both of which are critical to your academic success!

Finding the right fit for you may be a key step. The type assistance you receive at your campus counseling center may look different depending on your specific needs and their offerings. Some centers offer a variety of support, including individual, group, and couples counseling. They may also provide workshops on a number of commonly experienced issues, including ones you mentioned about time management and developing healthy habits. Additionally, if and when you do go check out the counseling services, it's a good idea to peruse the counseling service staff bios. Getting a sense of who you might like to speak with based on their areas of expertise may help you find a good match and make you feel more comfortable about taking the leap to get into counseling. And, once you get started, if you find that the provider you started with isn't the right fit for you, it's totally okay and a normal part of the process to switch to a different provider with whom you feel you may have a better connection.

Lastly, it's also worth exploring your options for assistance outside of your campus counseling services. Many campuses also employ health promotion specialists and health educators who can talk with you about a multitude of resources and do-it-yourself strategies to tackle topics such as life and time management, healthy eating habits, sleep hygiene, and stress coping. You may try this option and see if utilizing some of the advice shared by those professionals meets your needs.

All this to say, whether you seek out the help of the counseling service or other health professionals on your campus, learning more about how to be your best self doesn't have to be done on your own!

Alice!
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