



The American University of Kurdistan Policy of Counseling Services

Policy Number: AS045
Effective Date: November 30, 2023

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I. INTRODUCTION

- a. **Authority:** The Board of Trustees (herein referred to as “Board”) at The American University of Kurdistan (herein referred to as “AUK” or “University”) is authorized to establish rules and regulations to govern and operate the University and its programs.
- b. **Purpose:** The purpose of this policy is to outline the procedures and guidelines for the provision of Counseling Services at AUK. Counseling Services aims to support the overall well-being and academic success of Students by promoting campus-wide mental health, emotional resilience, and personal development.
- c. **Scope:** This policy applies to all matriculated Students, both CAPA and bachelor’s Students.

II. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

- a. **Responsible Executive:** President
- b. **Responsible Administrator:** Director of Student Affairs
- c. **Responsible Office:** Office of Student Affairs
- d. **Policy Contact:** Director of Student Affairs

I. POLICY STATEMENT

By promoting public mental health, AUK's Counseling Services (CS) aspires to cultivate a campus culture that embraces mental health as an integral component of overall Student success and holistic development. Through a compassionate and confidential approach, CS aims to create a safe space where Students can explore their emotions, enhance self-awareness, and acquire effective coping strategies to overcome personal, emotional, and academic challenges. The CS is also committed to collaborating with on-campus and off-campus stakeholders to advocate on behalf of mental health awareness, reduce stigma, and advocate for mental health on the regional and national levels.

Services offered include:

- Individual Counseling
- Group Counseling
- Workshops
- Crisis Intervention
- Referral Services

Group counseling is offered to address issues such as assertiveness, overcoming shyness, advancing communication skills, personal development, and other issues. The groups are normally closed and do not add members once the sessions start.

The CS offers a variety of workshops to provide psycho-education, support, and skills training in various areas of mental health and personal development. The workshops are short-term, structured, and agenda-led. The workshops are designed interactively to facilitate active group discussion and provide time for exercises. During the workshops, no one will be asked to share personal information.

The CS's services are available during the academic year when classes are in session and during regular business hours. No fee will be charged to Students for utilizing the services.

II. POLICY PRINCIPLES

- Counseling Services at AUK will foster supportive and inclusive campus community services that are free from discrimination based on age, race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, religion, disability, or any other protected characteristic.
- All Students matriculated in AUK's bachelor's and CAPA programs are eligible to benefit from the services provided by CS.
- The CS prioritizes client confidentiality and adheres to professional ethical standards regarding the privacy of personal information shared during counseling sessions.
- By promoting public mental health, the CS aspires to cultivate a campus culture that embraces mental health as an integral component of overall Student success and holistic development.
- CS will recruit qualified professionals who adhere to ethical guidelines as set forth by relevant, international professional bodies or organizations.

The counselors are expected to be familiar with and adhere to *The Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct* enacted by the American Psychological Association (APA) as well as the American Counseling Association (ACA). For more information, see http://www.apa.org/ethics/code2002.html#10_01. For the Professional Code of Ethics by the American Counselor Association: <http://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/ethics>.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a priority as Students must be provided with a safe, supportive, and empathetic space to express themselves. Information shared with the CS during individual sessions is subject to full confidentiality, including personal information, the content of the sessions, the number and frequency of sessions, and anything else that the Student has shared.

Though the counseling process is highly confidential, there are several situations where the counselor must report/release the information provided with or without the Student's permission. The counselor has the right to report to their immediate supervisor and the General Counsel of AUK:

- If the counselor assumes that the Student might be of danger to himself/herself or others;
- If the counselor suspects child abuse (below 18 years old), including sexual abuse, physical abuse, and neglect; and/or
- If the counselor suspects abuse of elderly and vulnerable adults to the General Counsel of AUK.

In keeping with professional ethics codes, maintaining the safety of Students and others takes precedence over maintaining the confidentiality of Students. In the event of a necessary disclosure of confidential information, only information vital to contributing to safety will be disclosed, and then only to persons in a position to make appropriate use of the information.

The Student may review his/her records of the counseling sessions, upon written request, which will become part of his/her counseling records. The counselor can give the Student a summary report of the therapeutic notes. Yet, the Student's counseling records and files are not educational records and are accessible only to the counselor and the Student, thus they are not shared with staff members in other units within AUK. If the Student requests any statement or release of information from the CS to a third party, then the Student must complete and sign an Information Release Form.

Crisis Intervention

Crisis intervention is a service offered to Students who are in serious or immediate emotional distress, including cases where:

- The Student verbally or behaviorally conveys that he/she is in crisis
- The Student seems to have lost connection with reality
- The Student upsets the university's ordinary operations and/or campus life
- The Student is in imminent danger to herself/himself or others
- The Student was exposed to attempted rape or rape
- The Student was exposed to physical or emotional abuse
- The Student identifies himself/herself as being in crisis
- Other extraordinary situations

A Student who faces an emergency will meet the Counselor during regular working hours. The Counselor will meet the Student and create a safety plan, including how to manage the crisis, and make follow-up appointments with the Student to further support him/her and build the necessary resilience skills.

Students in crisis can visit or call the Counseling Services during regular business hours; outside of hours, Students should contact the Office of Student Affairs by visiting room 47, Ground Floor, or sending an e-mail to auk.Studentaffairs@auk.edu.krd.

III. DEFINITIONS

- **Individual Counseling:** An individual counseling session is a process through which Student-clients work one-on-one with a professional psychologist in a safe, caring, and confidential environment.
- **Confidentiality:** Confidentiality means that the counselor/psychologist cannot share any personal information with a third party without first receiving authorization from the client. This includes parents, faculty, staff, or any person outside of the therapeutic relationship.
- **Group Counseling:** Group Counseling is a form of psychotherapy that usually involves four to ten participants and one or two group therapists. Most groups meet regularly at the same time for one to two hours. The members of the group discuss issues of concern and offer each other support and feedback.
- **Crisis:** Crisis can be defined as one's perception or experience of an event or situation as an intolerable difficulty that exceeds their current resources and coping mechanisms.
- **Crisis Intervention:** Crisis intervention refers to methods used to offer immediate, short-term help to individuals who experience a crisis.
- **Referral Services:** Counseling Services will utilize referrals to off-campus resources for all cases beyond the scope of the Counseling Services' activities.
- **Psychiatric Services:** Psychiatric services refer to the specialized medical services provided by trained medical doctors, specifically by psychiatrists or psychiatric professionals to assess, diagnose, and treat mental health disorders and prescribe medications.

VI. POLICY PROCEDURES

Individual counseling provides Students with the opportunity to present their concern(s) to the counselor during face-to-face sessions. The Student may approach the counselor with concerns/problems the Student had either before coming to AUK or during matriculation at AUK. The range of issues may vary, and may include but are not limited to emotional, personal, interpersonal, behavioral problems, academic problems, depression, anxiety, fear, loneliness, time management, eating concerns, homesickness, low self-esteem, sexual identity, exposure to abuse, domestic violence, family relationship issues, and others. Individual counseling provides Students with the possibility to reflect on their experiences and life circumstances, find the necessary resources to function better in the academic setting, perform better in social networking, and gain a better sense of life-impeding behaviors/situations.

Intake

At the intake session, Students aged 18 and above will be presented with the confidentiality procedures and will sign an informed consent form before the counseling begins. This measure signifies that the Student is fully informed and ready to engage in the counseling process. The counselor will take all necessary steps to ensure that the Student fully understands the confidentiality principles along with the exceptions. In the case of a Student below the age of 18, the informed consent form must be signed by a parent or guardian. In the case of a Student under 18 years who approaches Counseling Services with a sensitive issue such as sexual orientation, pregnancy, drug use, relational issues with parents, and/or does not want their parent(s) or guardian(s) to know about his/her engagement with the CS,

which can potentially inflict more psychological, moral, social and/or physical damage to the Student, the Student may be allowed to sign the consent form him/herself. This measure provides the Student with a safe, protective environment to talk.

Making Appointments

It is advised that the Student contacts the Counselor in person (room 47b, Ground Floor) or by email (counselingservices@auk.edu.krd). Scheduled appointments are highly recommended to ensure the Counselor's availability. During the first session, a Student will be asked to bring in the completed **Intake Form**. The Intake Form will aid in determining the specific needs of the Student, which will be discussed in more detail during the session.

The number of sessions for individual counseling is up to 16 sessions but may be extended based on need. The length of individual sessions is about 45 minutes. Group Counseling usually runs from 4 to 6 sessions, 1.5 hours per session. Students may either be referred for group counseling by the Counselor or be self-referred.

Late Arrivals

If the Student is late more than 15 minutes from the start time of the scheduled appointment, the late arrival will be noted on the Student's progress form. While the Student will be able to talk to the Counselor, habitual lateness may impact the Student's continuation in Counseling.

No Shows

"No show" is when a Student misses the appointment without cancelling or rescheduling the appointment. The "No show" appointment will count against the session limit. If the Student fails to show up for two consecutive sessions without advance notice, he/she will be notified of his/her ineligibility to utilize the service during the remainder of the academic semester. All efforts to reach out to Students are documented and maintained in the Student's file.

Cancellation

The Student may cancel the appointment 24 hours before the scheduled appointment by sending the notice to counselingservices@auk.edu.krd or by visiting the Office of Student Affairs. This is necessary to make the service available to other Students. If the Student makes regular cancellations, the Student will be notified of his/her ineligibility to utilize the services during the remainder of the academic semester.

Suicidal Case Protocols

If a Student has indicated a plan, attempted or has threatened to attempt, or has succeeded in inflicting bodily harm to him/herself or others, the Counselor will carry out a suicide evaluation with the Student. In the event a Student is actively suicidal during a meeting with the counselor (i.e. has expressed hopelessness, a desire to die or kill him or herself, has access to means, has indicated a plan, etc.), the Student will not be left alone; further action will be taken.

If the Student has not inflicted bodily harm:

1. Call the President (or designee) for support.
2. Discuss hospitalization with the Student.
3. If the Student will go voluntarily to a hospital, ask him/her to contact someone who can accompany them to the hospital for a psychiatric evaluation.
4. The Student should be informed that his/her family must be notified.

5. During business hours, the AUK Institutional Relations Manager will call the emergency psychiatric team ahead of time. The AUK representative should identify him or herself as an AUK staff member, discuss the admission, and check on bed availability.
6. An AUK representative assigned by the AUK President will contact the Student's family to inform them about the Student's situation.
7. Before returning to AUK, the Student must submit a medical clearance from the psychiatrist, which will state the assessment and an ongoing treatment plan, if applicable. The statement should clearly state that the Student can resume studies and his/her mental health concerns will not present any risks to the Student or those in his/her environment.

If the Student has inflicted bodily harm:

In cases a reasonable person would regard as serious, where the person is believed to have ingested substance(s) the effect of which is uncertain, or where the extent of the injury is unknown and the Student is unresponsive to stimuli, the Student will not be left alone. The incident will be immediately reported to the President, General Counsel, Director of Student Affairs, and the Counselor. AUK will arrange for an ambulance to transport the Student to the hospital and then contact the AUK doctor during working hours. Upon arrival of the ambulance, the Student will be taken immediately to the nearest hospital. Private transportation should be used as a last resort in emergency cases and this needs to be reported to the direct supervisor as soon as possible. The whole process will be conducted in a strictly confidential manner to avoid jeopardizing the Student's well-being.

Referral Services

As the CS provides services on a short-term basis to Students and offers limited services, the CS will utilize referrals for all cases beyond the scope of the CS's activities. The Student will be referred, upon the Student's agreement, to the appropriate external therapist or agency specializing in that issue. Some of the examples of the referral can be:

- Students with suicidal ideations, threats
- Students with psychiatric issues
- Students who might require long-term treatment
- Students with drug/alcohol abuse
- Any other cases that might be unprecedented and will require specialized care

When a referral is made, it is the Student's discretion to follow up with the referrals provided by the counselor or mental health professional. In cases where a referral is recommended, the Student or the family will be responsible for the financial aspects of off-campus services and further treatment.

Termination of Services

Utilizing Counseling Services, particularly individual and group counseling is completely voluntary. In some cases, the Counselor may terminate the counseling sessions, as it might be more appropriate therapeutically. Other circumstances when the Counselor may terminate the sessions can be attributed to the Student's lack of commitment or upon the Counselor's assessment of the sessions not being beneficial. The termination of services may occur when

- The Student has reached the goals set for the counseling
- The Student has left the University
- The Student has taken temporary leave from study

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- The Student has been referred to another counselor or agency for specialized care
- The Student makes repetitive cancellations (two consecutive cancellations)
- The Student misses appointments (two consecutively missed appointments)

In the cases of the last two, the Student will be notified of their ineligibility to utilize Counseling Services via e-mail by his/her Counselor.

Faculty Support for Students of Concern

The CS provides consultation to faculty and staff who might have concerns about a Student, including academic, behavioral, emotional, or personal. Support may include:

- Assisting members of the university community to develop a greater understanding of the mental health needs of the Students and gain a better understanding of the services offered.
- Improving the quality of life on campus by raising awareness about the importance of mental health in personal and professional development.
- Providing consultation services to AUK faculty and staff concerning goal setting, decision-making, conflict resolution, and identification of the best ways of supporting Students in need of support.
- Providing training on how to identify, approach, and help Students in need and provision of learning experiences through classroom presentations.

Documentation and Retention of Student Files

The Student's files will be maintained for seven (7) years following the last contact with the counselor. At the end of the seven (7) years, files will be destroyed. A record of destroyed files will be maintained by AUK's CS. This record shall include the counselor's name, date of last contact, and date the file was destroyed.

- The Student will be asked to fill in the Intake Form, which becomes part of the Student's counseling records.
- All CS contact with the Student will be documented in Student counseling files. "Hard" paper copies of such documentation will be placed in the Student files as soon as such documentation is available.
- All the files will be kept individually in a locked file cabinet in the CS and accessible only to the counselor.
- Every Student will need to read and sign the consent form, which becomes part of the Student's counseling record files.
- The records of each session will become part of the Student file.
- Each of the cancelled, missed appointments or cases when the Student came late, including the minutes missed, are part of the files; if there is written correspondence (and emails) between the Counselor and the Student, it too will become part of the files.
- Documentation of emergency or other services provided after regular working hours will be completed as soon as practically possible, using the Progress Note Form.
- Documentation of any Student's permission to release confidential information will be made using the CS's release form. The original will be kept in the Student's file.
- Copies of correspondence (including e-mail messages) with or about Students will be included in Student counseling files.

VII. POLICY HISTORY

- a. **Approved by:** Board of Trustees
- b. **Adopted:** November 30, 2023