



Clinical Counseling Services

IMSA students will be able to resolve most of the difficulties they experience at the academy with the assistance of their RC, parents, friends, or staff members. There may be times when social/emotional issues interfere with the adjustment to the Academy's academic or residential program. These issues may include: homesickness, anxiety, depression, inability to concentrate, family crises, stress, relationship difficulties, low self-esteem, or other self-destructive behaviors (i.e. drug and alcohol abuse, eating problems, cutting). Many students just “need to talk” and frequently seek out the counselors without having any “identified problem.” In other words, it is OK to just “chat” with a counselor to get another perspective, bounce some ideas off of them, or simply build a relationship with another adult in the community.

Why would I want to see a Counselor?

The counselors at IMSA understand that not all students have had a positive experience with members of the counseling profession. We also understand that IMSA students can be very independent people who often pride themselves on finding solutions to their own problems. Most “IMSA Kids” will talk to each other before seeking out a trusted adult or mental health professional. This informal helping network is an extremely important part of the residential life experience at IMSA and we encourage our students to take full advantage of peer and adult relationships. Often times, the decision to see a counselor is made during a crisis situation or after an extended period of emotional pain, problems or confusion. This can be a humbling experience in which the student sometimes feels ashamed or embarrassed that they need help from an outside source. More often than not, mental health is a *decision* that is enhanced by admitting a need for assistance. The process of counseling is designed to meet that need.

When should I see a Counselor?

Seeing an IMSA counselor is a personal decision. Some students come to the counselors for a few meetings to help clarify their thinking, check in about specific issues in their lives, or just talk with someone who is willing to listen. Other kids come in for one session just to see if talking about the issue or concern would help, or to get a second opinion separate from their other resources. Sometimes they come in with a friend and sometimes a friend brings them in. Students often seek out the counselors when issues or concerns affect their academic performance, or when they are experiencing specific academic stresses and difficulties. A good rule of thumb is if you are thinking about talking with someone or another person suggests you talk to someone, that is the time to go in. When your usual ways of handling a situation no longer seem productive, your usual coping strategies don't seem to be working that well, you feel like you're in a vicious cycle, or just plain feel like things are not getting better, that is the time to talk. Talking about a situation before it turns into a major crisis is a great way to enhance self-esteem and build effective coping mechanisms. It also makes you feel better!

Are the counseling needs of IMSA Kids similar to those of other high school students?

Research supports the obvious*: gifted students have the same basic counseling needs, issues and concerns that other high school students have. However, “talented and gifted” students may experience additional concerns stemming from their more complex intellectual functioning. These would include some of the following:

- Difficulty owning their own abilities and not feeling confident in academic or social settings
- Brighter students often feel as if they must prove themselves to teachers, peers and parents, thus increasing their stress at home and in school
- Students may experience greater feelings of self-doubt
- Talented and gifted students often have plans and desires that compete with those of their parents and teachers. This can cause the student to feel pushed or pressured by the demands of others
- These students feel like an overwhelming number of options are being presented to them (this is especially true for IMSA Kids)
- Gifted children experience stress more intensely than their peers do
- Feelings of depression and sadness are often more “existential” in nature rather than related to a specific situation. They frequently experience a “crisis of meaning”
- Gifted children engage in negative self-talk beginning at an earlier age. Because they also tend to seek perfection, these children tend to be overly critical of themselves and struggle with greater feelings of inadequacy
- Because of their constant “search for meaning” talented and gifted children (especially adolescents) often become concerned with problems that are beyond their control, thus causing increased feelings of helplessness.

(*Adapted from Shelly, RW; Getz, HG; Mathai, CM; Defining Counselor Roles and Functions in a National Consortium School: A New Paradigm. NCSSSMST Journal. May 2002. Pp. 9-14.)

How do students get in to see a Counselor?

Most students refer themselves to a counselor by simply signing up for an appointment on the sign-up sheet outside the counselor's office door. They can also email the counselor to arrange a time that is convenient for them, or the student can just drop by at any time. Students are encouraged to sign up for a time during a free period or after school to avoid conflict with class schedules. Students should sign up for a time during a free period or after school to avoid conflict with class schedules. However, this is not always possible. If the student feels they need to see a counselor right away or are experiencing an "emergency situation", they may ask the teacher to leave class and just come down to the counseling office, knock on the door, and tell the counselor that they need to talk.

At other times, a concerned RC, staff member, or parent may contact the counselor and ask that the student be seen. Usually, the "referral source" (mom, dad or teacher) shares their concerns about a student with the counselor via phone or email, but does not usually share these concerns directly with the student. Whenever possible, it is highly recommended that concerns be shared with the student prior to the referral. That way, the student understands what some of the issues are prior to seeing the counselor and will feel that the process is not "secretive." Sometimes it is not possible to share concerns with the student directly before they are seen by the counselor or the "referral source" (friend or parent) wants to remain anonymous. In such cases the counselor does not need to disclose the identity of the referral source and will "call slip" the student in to discuss the concerns directly. If a student needs to be pulled out of a class for a discussion, the counselor will excuse the student from that class or classes.

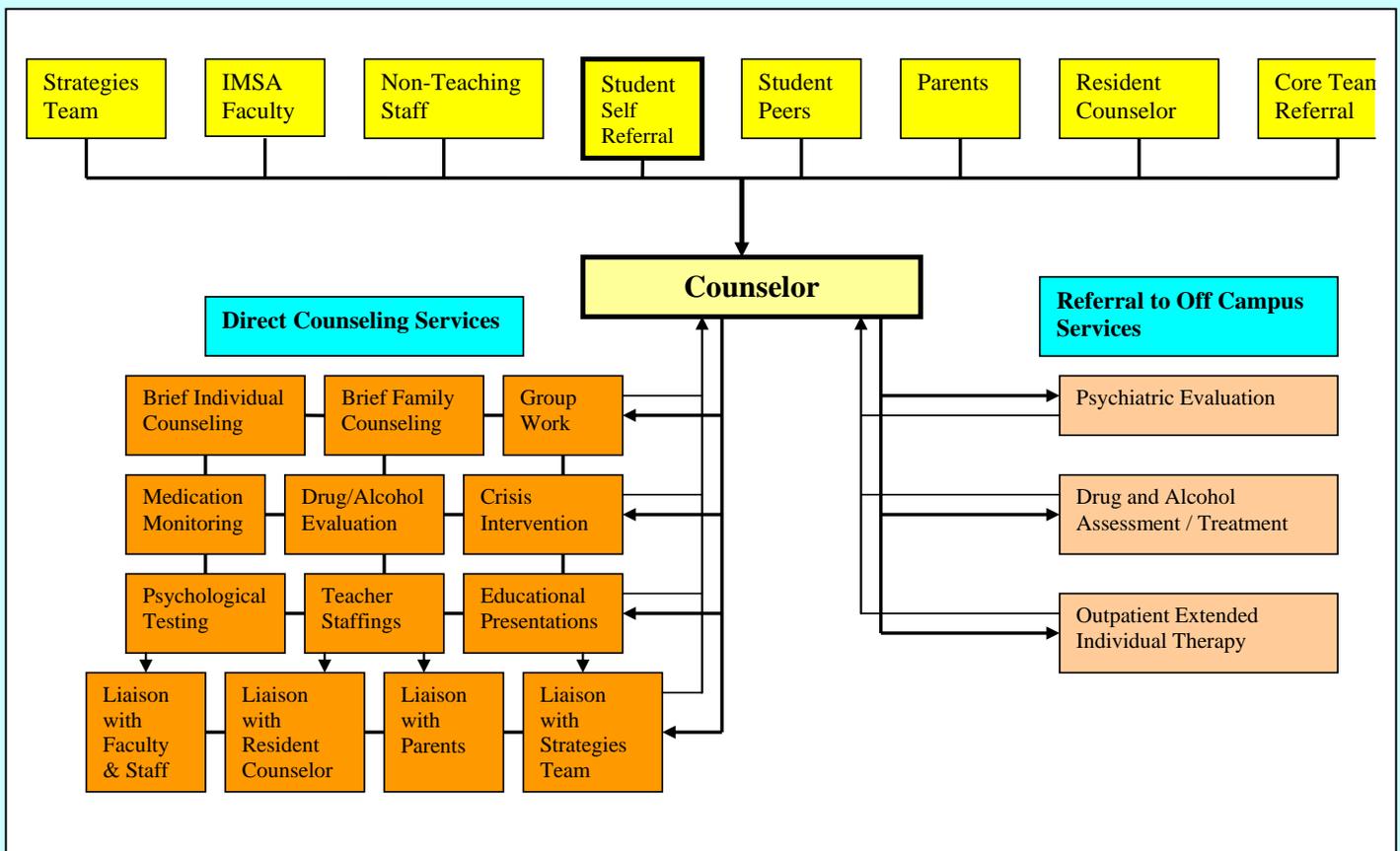
Are discussions with a counselor confidential?

Yes. Under most circumstances the information a student shares with the counselor is confidential. The dates and times of counseling appointments or counseling session notes are not kept in the student's school file. They are kept in a secured file on the IMSA student life server, accessible only by the counselors and the Director of Student Leadership and Development. That means the counselor cannot share any information with another person without the student's consent, which also includes the student's parents. If any information is to be disclosed to a source *outside* IMSA like a doctor or therapist, the student and parents must sign a *written* consent to do so.

There are exceptions to confidentiality. If a student is suspected of being a danger to themselves or others, the counselor may break confidentiality and reveal enough information to resolve the crisis. In addition, the counselors, teachers and staff at IMSA are state mandated reporters of suspected child abuse or neglect.

What actual “services” are provided by the Clinical Counselors?

The counselors provide mainly crisis intervention, consultation and individual counseling on a short-term basis. On most days, the counseling office serves as a “drop in” counseling center where students just drop in to chat. This may result in setting up future appointments or the student may drop in as needed through out the school year. At other times, the student is referred by a variety of on and off campus resources (see the yellow boxes in the Counseling Flow Chart below). Short-term counseling would be considered from 7-10 individual sessions, after which the student would drop in now and then for follow-up. The IMSA counselors cannot be used for ongoing individual or family therapy since their time is divided among 650+ students. If extended treatment is indicated, a referral to an off-campus counselor will be made.



Explanation of adjunct Clinical Counseling Services

- **Medication Monitoring:** All psychotropic medications (antidepressants, ADD meds etc.) must be dispensed by the school nurse. The counselors assist in monitoring the student for possible side effects and improvement in symptoms. A student evaluated by the counselor who is determined to be suffering from a clinical disorder (depression, anxiety, ADD etc.) may be referred for an off-campus medication evaluation. While IMSA cannot and does not force a student to take any kind of medication, we can insist that the student follow the recommendations of the evaluating physician. This would depend on how extensively the student's symptoms affect their social, academic, psychological or physical health while living on campus.
- **Drug and Alcohol Evaluation:** If a student is found to have violated the substance use policy at IMSA, the counselors provide a direct referral for a substance abuse evaluation. The student must then follow the recommendations of that evaluation in order to return to school.
- **Crisis Intervention:** the counselors work closely with the Residence Hall Counselors (RC's) to intervene when a student is in crisis. The Clinical Counselors are available 24 hours a day 7 days a week for consultation and on-campus evaluation and referral.
- **Psychological Testing:** A limited psychological assessment can be performed on a student who is recommended for such services through the Learning Strategies Specialist. The testing can involve IQ assessment, Achievement Testing, Personality Assessment, and screening for Attention Deficit Disorder, anxiety and depression.
- **Teacher Staffings:** The counselors can organize and attend a staffing composed of the student's teachers and other staff involved in their educational experience at the academy. The purpose of such a staffing would be to identify strengths and weaknesses in the student's academic performance and construct interventions to assist with any difficulties. Students who are away from the academy for a minimum of 5 academic days will automatically receive a re-entry staffing to determine how to assist them in making up work.
- **Counselor Liaison:** The counselors participate in a wide range of Liaisons and consultations with students, parents, staff, residential life, and off campus treatment providers. The goal is to provide continuity in constructing, implementing and monitoring intervention plans to assist students who are having psychosocial / academic difficulties.