

## #5c - Navigating Counseling Services on Campus: Advice from a Former Campus Counselor with IH

### ***Understanding and Accessing Resources for College Students with Idiopathic Hypersomnia***

*This guide is intended to provide general information about campus resources for counseling. We will use the term **Counseling Center** for the campus offices that provide resources for students who want to address issues that may be affecting their ability to succeed in academic work and maintain emotional health. Counseling Centers may also be referred to as Counseling Services. Campuses differ, and offices that provide counseling resources may have specific protocols for providing services to their students.*

The goals of this guide are to:

- Understand the purpose of the Counseling Centers and the services they provide;
- Understand how the Centers may help students with IH; and
- Provide general information on how to access these important resources.

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#### **1. What Is the Counseling Center on a Campus?**

Sometimes problems may seem overwhelming, especially when struggling with IH symptoms along with adjusting to the rigors of college. Students often go to Counseling Centers and say that they “feel overwhelmed.” By working with a counselor individually, or in a group with student peers, those areas in the students’ lives contributing to feeling overwhelmed can be discussed in a safe and supportive environment, and strategies for coping and bringing about changes can be learned.

College Counseling Centers often work with students with a variety of issues and concerns, including family concerns, stress, depression, anxiety, relationship concerns, adjustment issues, identity concerns, and many other issues unique to the

individual student. **If you are experiencing an issue that is causing any kind of distress, including difficulties with managing IH symptoms, then it is appropriate to contact the Counseling Center on campus.**

**If you are an online student who is not campus-based or does not have physical access to campus,** there is information about counseling services for you in the Counseling Services section of the Online Education guide (<https://www.hypersomniafoundation.org/wp-content/uploads/4a-Online-Education.pdf>).

**Most Counseling Centers are available to all enrolled students at no or minimal charge.** They are most often located on campus so that they are convenient to use.

**In general, the goals of Campus Counseling Centers are to:**

- Support and promote the emotional well-being of students so they have a better chance of academic success;
- Assist students with adjustment to college life and concurrent pursuit of academic, social and career goals; and
- Provide a safe, accepting, non-judgmental, and respectful environment to discuss personal concerns.

**Summary:** Counseling Centers are accessible (easy to get to, affordable) and relevant to the needs of college students. They are a safe place, where students should not be judged by their race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, disability, medical issue, or any concern they have.

## **2. Are Services Confidential?**

Counseling services are confidential, which means no one will know that you are attending the sessions and nothing that is discussed is disclosed without your expressed, written consent. Exceptions to confidentiality include concerns over harm to self or harm to others, including suspected child abuse, elder abuse, or suspected abuse of other dependent persons.

## **3. How Is This Information Relevant to Students with IH?**

Sleepiness may interfere with getting up on time, being able to sit through a class without falling asleep, being able to attend social activities, staying awake while studying, focusing, and organizing work for the course, etc.

Any type of personal issue that students experience, especially if it interferes with their academic success and emotional well being, is appropriate to discuss at the Counseling Center. Sometimes the Counseling Center will connect students to additional resources if they are deemed more helpful. While counselors are not able to treat IH specifically, they do offer a safe, respectful, and supportive environment,

in which to discuss concerns and find ways to cope. You may feel less alone and more empowered to tackle issues that feel overwhelming.

**College is an adjustment for all students. A few common areas for adjustment for students, regardless of whether they have a disability, are:**

- Rigorous academic demands;
- Multiple assignments due in short amounts of time and at the same time;
- Longer classes or extra requirements in or out of the classroom;
- Additional attendance requirements (check the syllabus for course expectations); and
- Living away from home and familiar support systems.

**For students with IH, college presents additional challenges, which are unique in their own ways:**

- Some students may have been recently diagnosed and are trying to understand and adapt to their condition.
- Some may have had IH for a long time and have some adaptive strategies, but the challenges of college are requiring new coping strategies.
- Other students may be suffering from symptoms of IH, do not understand what is wrong, and may be discouraged with themselves and with college due to their struggles.
- Finally, most students with IH may not know anyone else who experiences the profound sleepiness that they do. Other students, and faculty as well, may be sympathetic but find it difficult to truly understand and may be at a loss as to how to help.
- Extracurricular activities may enhance the college experience but can be particularly challenging or stressful for students with IH. Students with IH may want to get involved in activities but find that it can be too difficult to follow through with them because of sleepiness.
- Living away from home, on or near campus, challenges students with IH to create new safety nets for themselves to replace the ones their loved ones had in place for them, such as alarms for waking, management of medications (including renewing and acquiring them), organization regimens, etc.
- Students with IH may try to keep up with other students' schedules and may feel frustrated when that does not work well. It is normal that students with IH would feel isolated and frustrated with this going on.

#### **4. How Can Counseling Help?**

*Counseling can't change the symptoms of IH, but it can be a relief to explain your concerns to someone who listens with compassion, without judgment, with*

*acceptance, who cares, and will do their best to understand and help you find ways to better cope and create strategies to manage the effects of the symptoms.*

Counselors generally understand that each person is unique. Counselors often:

- Assist the students with IH with identifying what is working and not working.
- Explore with the students the types of schedules and approaches to managing their IH symptoms each day that are unique to their needs. (There are no “answers”, especially because IH presents differently in different people and at different times.)
- Help the students with IH develop greater awareness of what types of schedules and activities work best for them.
- Counselors may connect students with IH to other helpful resources on or off campus.
- But most importantly, the counselor will work with students who have IH as important, unique, and worthy people, who need to navigate life a little differently, shifting focus from “I can’t do this...” to **“These are things I can do well.”**

**Summary:** Counseling can help promote a greater sense of emotional well-being, by treating students with IH with respect, support, understanding, and acceptance. A goal is for students with IH is to focus on their strengths and abilities, and develop strategies for addressing their academic, personal, and social concerns, to the best of their abilities. Counselors also know many resources on campus and can be very helpful in connecting students with IH to resources that may be useful.

## **5. How do I learn more about the Counseling Center on my campus, and how would I set an appointment?**

*(Below are general guidelines that may be true for many but not necessary all campuses. Please check with your campus to get specific information about services provided.)*

- Most campuses have Orientation programs for new students, which will review all student-support services, including the Counseling Center.
- There often are brochures or flyers in common areas.
- Another very good way to learn about the Counseling Center on your campus is to go online and look under SUPPORT SERVICES for students or search directly for “Counseling Services” or “Counseling Center” in the search bar.
- Most Counseling Centers on campus have websites that provide a great deal of information about their services, including but not limited to:
  - Eligibility (generally all enrolled students are eligible)
  - How to set an appointment (this may be done over the phone, or students may walk into the Counseling Center and arrange the appointment there)

- Statement about confidentiality
- Number of sessions available
- If services are free or if there is a cost
- Types of forms to be filled out at the first session or in advance of the first session
- Overview of counseling staff and interns working at the campus center
- Online tips for a variety of personal concerns (to enhance rather than take the place of individual sessions)
- Crisis Resources, including what to do if you need to see someone right away and what is available when the campus Counseling Center is closed

**Summary:** Most higher education campuses offer free or low cost services at the Counseling Centers, which often are located on or near campus. One way to find these services is online through the campus main web page. Search terms include, but are not limited to, "Support Services for Students," "Counseling Center," "Counseling Services," and "Crisis Resources." There may be differences in number of available sessions, but most Centers have some sessions at low or no cost and most also will have crisis protocols for support in place as well.

## 6. Help May Be an App Away!

Many higher education institutions offer a variety of self-help resources, which may include "wellness apps." These Apps can be accessed from the students' smartphones, tablets, or computers **at any time of the day or night**, which can be very helpful for students with IH.

In addition to measuring levels of stress or giving feedback on your mood, they are designed to provide personal tips and tools for finding ways to feel better. While this does not take the place of personal counseling, it can be a wonderful resource for learning more about yourself and your feelings, and for taking initial steps towards your personal wellness goals.

**IMPORTANT:** If you are feeling in crisis, hopeless, or suicidal, please seek out help from the Campus Counseling Center or local emergency resource right away. They are there to provide support during a difficult time. A wellness app may alert you to feelings of crisis and who to contact if, in fact, you are in a crisis, but it is generally not meant to be the sole resource in a crisis situation.

**How do I find out if my Campus has a "wellness app" for me to use?** A good first step is to check on the Counseling Center or Counseling Services information page, with "Self-Help Resources" as a search term. You may also consider calling the Counseling Center and asking them, or checking with your Orientation or Academic Advisor.

**Approved by the Hypersomnia Foundation Board of Directors  
Vetted by Olivia Robbins BA, who also provided Technical Assistance  
Reviewed by outside legal counsel**

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