

## **Frequently Asked Questions about the Ithaca College Counseling Center and Psychological Services, for and by LGBT and Allied students:**

What services does the Counseling Center and Psychological Services provide? In what ways are the needs of LGBT and Allied students addressed?

Here are some of the most common questions about the Counseling Center and Psychological Services and its services that our LGBT and Allied students ask:

**Q:** What kinds of concerns come up for people who identify as LGBT (whether in the closet or out)? Can the Counseling Center and Psychological Services provide support for these kinds of issues?

**A:** There are many concerns that may – or may not – come up for people who identify as LGBT, including, but not limited to: homophobia, depression/anxiety, occupational concerns, substance abuse, relationship/intimacy issues, gender expression, HIV/AIDS. Some of these concerns are not exclusive to LGBT people. For example, many people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender, experience symptoms of anxiety and or depression. What's important to remember is that you don't have to cope with these concerns on your own. The Counseling Center and Psychological Services can provide support for these issues, and more.

**Q:** I'm interested in talking with a counselor who personally identifies as a specific sexual orientation or gender identity. Is that possible at the Counseling Center and Psychological Services?

**A:** The Counseling Center and Psychological Services makes every attempt to honor specific therapist requests.

For example, a student may prefer to work with a male therapist, or one who has specific training or experience in an area that the student is struggling with, such as LGBT issues. Depending on a student's goals for therapy, one of the roles of therapy may be to explore the validity of assumptions he or she might be making, including assumptions about the therapist's sexual orientation and that therapist's ability to help. Regardless of a therapist's sexual orientation or identity, he or she is trained to help in a supportive, non-judgmental way.

**Q:** My same-sex partner and I are having relationship problems. Can we visit the Counseling Center and Psychological Services as a couple? What if my partner does not attend IC?

**A:** Yes, the Counseling Center provides relationship counseling for same-sex couples. If your partner is not an IC student, you may attend counseling sessions together after you meet with a counselor for recommendations and your partner signs a Client Consent for Counseling form. The Counseling Center and Psychological Services also offers relationship counseling for people having difficulty in friendship relationships and in shared-living situations. Go to <http://www.ithaca.edu/sacl/counseling/> for more information.

**Q:** Are there services (group sessions, etc.) available specifically for LGBT issues?

**A:** In addition to individual therapy/counseling, the counseling center offers group therapy that provides students with the opportunity to explore thoughts, feelings, and relationships with peers in the presence of a professional group leader. Group topics/themes may vary from one semester to the next, and have included groups specifically for LGBT people. Often, groups are formed based on a perceived, or known, need on campus. If you are interested in participating in an LGBT-related group, please let us know. The Counseling Center and Psychological Services can also offer educational programs to the campus community that specifically target LGBT issues.

These programs are available at times when clinical demand is lower. Call 274-3136 for an outreach request form with more information.

**Q:** I'm concerned about coming out to my parents. Would it be beneficial for me to seek counseling in order to explore this?

**A:** Many people have found it beneficial to seek counseling in order to explore coming out to family and friends. Some of the ways a therapist might be helpful to you include: exploring pros and cons, what to say if you do decide to come out, and preparing for a range of reactions your family/friends might have to your coming out. A therapist can also help you research and identify additional useful resources.

**Q:** I have a friend who is LGBT and out, who is having a difficult time functioning in other aspects of everyday life. Is it possible that these things are related? If so, how can I help?

**A:** It is possible, and likely, that a number of different factors are contributing to your friend's difficulties, including being LGBT. Being in the minority – whether ethnic, racial, sexual, or otherwise – poses challenges in our society. Always remember, it is important to seek professional help before things become too overwhelming, for either you or your friend. You can help by letting your friend know that you accept and appreciate her/him for who s/he is, and by letting her/him know that you are available to listen. You can also let your friend know that the Counseling Center and Psychological Services is available to help.

**Q:** I came out to one of my friends, who is having a really difficult time with it. I want to help. How can I do this?

**A:** Let her/him know that you're the same person you were before you came out to her/him. The only thing that's different is that s/he knows something about you that s/he didn't know previously. You can let your friend know that s/he can ask questions of you to find out more about what it means for you to be LGBT. You can provide reading materials, much of which is available at the Center for LGBT Education, Outreach, and Services. Before coming out to a friend, family member, or colleague, it can be helpful to prepare for the many ways in which that person might react, including the possibility that that person might have a difficult time at first with this new information about you. It might take time for this person to adjust, just as it likely took time for you to adjust to realizations about your own sexual identity. Seeing a counselor at the Counseling Center can help you sort out your thoughts, and decide how you want to respond to your friend.

**Q:** Can the Counseling Center and Psychological Services provide services to youth in the community who identify as LGBTQ and may need to seek guidance/therapy for issues/concerns/problems they may be facing due to their sexuality?

**A:** Counseling Center and Psychological services are available only to enrolled Ithaca College students, or to people with concerns about an IC student. However, there are a number of services in the Ithaca community that may benefit LGBTQ youth. If there is a particular person you are concerned about, you can talk to a counselor about helping a friend and finding resources, and obtain support and referrals for that person.

*Special thanks to the members of the student groups prism and Created Equal for sharing their most common questions about the Counseling Center and Psychological Services, and to Paul Soper, Counseling Center and Psychological Services intern who proposed and managed much of this project.*