Congratulations on your decision to pursue counseling; while no one can solve your problems for you, counselors help you learn to cope with life stressors effectively. In order to build a relationship and for treatment planning purposes, counselors spend the first several counseling sessions gathering biological, psychological, social, and spiritual information about you. So that your counselor knows how to help, it is necessary for you to identify your problems and/or needs.

If, at any time, you are having trouble identifying your problems or needs, it may be helpful to use/answer the following prompts.

I am seeking counseling because I want to learn how to ____________________________.

I am seeking counseling because I don’t know what to do about ____________________________.

I am seeking counseling because I want a safe place to talk about ____________________________.

I am seeking counseling because I want to change the way I ____________________________.

Once you and your counselor identify presenting problems, you will discuss a plan of care. This may include prioritizing your needs, identifying external resources you may need, discussing specific models for treatment (and related risks and benefits), and/or establishing goals for treatment.

In follow up sessions, counselors are responsible for the structure of sessions; you are responsible for the content of sessions.

In session, and with respect to your needs and goals, it is your responsibility to:

1. Discuss behaviors, feelings, and thoughts
2. Discuss successes, challenges, and barriers
3. Discuss continued or changing needs or problems
4. Ask questions
5. Process assigned tasks or homework

In session, and with respect to your needs and goals, it is the counselor’s responsibility to:

1. Teach skills
2. Design/assign therapeutic homework/tasks
3. Provide psychoeducation/answer relevant questions*
4. Guide you through specific therapeutic processes
5. Provide constructive and/or supportive feedback
6. Listen and ask follow-up questions
7. Challenge thought distortions that may be contributing to problems

*Note: While counselors may present options or assign tasks designed to facilitate therapeutic progress, counselors do not “give advice” or make decisions for you. They cannot answer the question, “What should I do?” for you.