

St. John's Prep. & Senior School



Policy for Counselling

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St. John's School Counselling Policy

Introduction

What is counselling? According to the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP): *Counselling takes place when a counsellor sees a client in a private and confidential setting to explore a difficulty the client is having; distress they may be experiencing or perhaps their dissatisfaction with life, or loss of a sense of direction or purpose. It is always at the request of the client as no-one can be 'sent' for counselling.*

For young people at St. John's School

Counselling and psychotherapy are often viewed as part of a continuum and the terms can sometimes be used synonymously.

It should be noted that there are some difficulties in applying the above BACP definition to the field of counselling children and young people.

- Children and young people are less likely to initiate therapy or counselling; they may be referred or encouraged to attend counselling by teachers, carers or other adults.
- Children and young people with challenging behaviour may be referred for counselling in order to help them change their behaviour rather than to provide emotional support or alleviate any underlying distress.

At St. John's School, we provide the opportunity for pupils to undertake counselling as a way of helping young people through talking and listening. The child or young person is encouraged to express their feelings and thoughts about any issues of concern so they can understand themselves and their behaviour better and identify and improve their ways of coping.

We support BACP's recommendation that, 'Counselling involves a deliberately undertaken contract with agreed boundaries and commitment to privacy and confidentiality. It requires explicit and informed consent', (BACP Code of Ethics and Practice).

Counselling offers pupils a regular space and time to talk and think about worries or difficulties and with the support of a professional counsellor, helps young people explore their feelings and look at how they might want things to be different, by talking and using a range of activities. The counsellor's support is available to pupils in relation to a range of issues including developmental issues, resolving family or friendship concerns, improving relationships, making choices, coping with changes, seeking insight and understanding, or growing as a person.

Counselling service is provided by a trained, fully qualified counsellor, who is checked by the Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) and works within the BACP Code of Ethics and Practice.

How the counselling fits in with our pastoral provision at St. John's

All pupils in school can access a range of pastoral support. Staff are committed to providing support characterised by good listening and problem solving strategies. Some staff may have been trained in aspects of counselling and will bring these skills to bear when talking with children. Where staff, parents or the pupils themselves identify that there may be a need for additional support, our counselling service will be one of the options available. At St. John's School, counselling is perceived as a very specialist type of intervention, contributing to the network of support within the school.

Examples of pastoral support and counselling for pupils at St. John's School

- Pastoral support systems in school: form tutors, teachers, other members of staff.
- School-based counsellors.
- Other specialist support.

Pastoral support

Available to all pupils in the school community, providing accessible support; including available information, on support services locally and nationally.

Key Professionals

All school staff, especially tutors/class teachers, those delivering SMSC. Also, Headmaster, Headmistress, Deputy Heads, Head of Year, House Mistress/Master.

Identified support (other than counselling)

Identification through the pastoral system or self-referral of a need for additional support, (other than counselling) including the possible involvement of outside agencies, pastoral support plans, including 1:1 or group work.

Key professionals

Head of Year, form teacher, House Mistress/Master.

Counselling

Identification through the pastoral system (as a result of certain criteria being met) or self-referral, of a need for specific 1:1 counselling (appendix A).

What qualifications and training does our school counsellor have?

The school counsellor is aware of, and sensitive to, the different needs and demands that a school community imposes on young people and those who have responsibility for them.

The current counsellor is knowledgeable and experienced in working with young people and is skilled in building rapport with children and young people.

Given the vulnerability of young people, our counsellor is qualified in accredited theoretical principles, high level practice skills and other specialised areas of counselling, as well as being BACP accredited.

When might counselling help students at St. John's?

Counselling can be an early intervention strategy to prevent deterioration in the emotional wellbeing, behaviour and attitude of a child or young person. It can provide an opportunity to enhance a young person's self-esteem and ability to cope more effectively at school. It is recognised that counselling will not always be an appropriate intervention, for example, young people with long-standing behavioural or personality issues may find it difficult or impossible to engage in the counselling process.

Issues or concerns which may be raised with the counsellor could include:

- Family problems and relationships
- School-related issues – homework, pressure of exams
- Relationships with peers in school
- Relationships with peers outside school
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Anger
- Physical health
- Identity issues
- Sexual behaviour/orientation
- Bereavement/loss
- Self-harm
- Eating disorders
- Substance abuse
- Future education/careers
- Spirituality
- Social network abuse
- Sleep issues

Referrals, confidentiality and parental consent

Referrals

Referrals for counselling are likely to follow the identification process and assessment of need as outlined earlier.

Why is confidentiality important?

Confidentiality will generally be essential to the formal counselling process, but the counsellor will be at liberty to make disclosures on a 'need to know' basis to appropriate individuals and agencies if issues of child protection or safeguarding arise.

Confidentiality is important;

- To enable the young person to develop a trusting relationship with the counsellor
- To allow the young person to be honest and share feelings without fear of blame or reprisal
- To allow the young person to speak freely about issues concerning them
- To encourage others to come forward for counselling
- To reflect obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998 Article 8, the right to privacy.

Mutual trust, goodwill and respect between counsellor, school, staff and parents, will help ensure that confidentiality is maintained. The staff and the counsellor will encourage a young person to discuss their counselling with their parents in appropriate cases.

A young person is free to talk to anyone about their counselling sessions if they wish, but will not be directly questioned by staff. Parents are encouraged to be sensitive to a young person's wishes when seeking to discuss counselling.

The counsellor will not pass on detailed accounts of sessions, but may, with the child's permission, communicate periodically with the school pastoral staff about the support being provided. A young person may wish a trusted member of staff to know they are receiving counselling in order to feel supported between counselling sessions.

The school counsellor will keep a record of issues raised by children and young people in general categories, and share this with the school in order to help inform the school's development of its policies and procedures for supporting its pupils.

Sometimes the counsellor will identify that it is in the best interests of the child or young person to liaise with, or refer the young person to another agency for help, for example, where there are mental health concerns. This will be with the young person's express permission and/or parental consent unless there are child protection or safeguarding concerns, in which case the need to safeguard the child or young person's welfare and safety will take precedence (please refer to Safeguarding Policy).

What limits are there to confidentiality?

Whilst it is recognised that: *'Any attempt to remove the principle of confidentiality in counselling will rapidly undermine the overall ethos of the school as a caring educational community'*, (Roger Casemore, Confidentiality & School Counselling,

BACP 1995), a child or young person's wishes about confidentiality may be overridden by the paramount duty to protect their safety or welfare.

Breaching confidentiality

The counsellor will, at the outset of working with a child or young person, make it clear to the young person that they may need to breach confidentiality (i.e. tell someone and seek support). They will explain it may happen when the young person or any other person (adult or child) is at risk of significant harm.

The counsellor will discuss this again with the young person if the need arises, and, if the child is 'Gillick competent', seek to gain their consent to disclosing concerns. The counsellor may make disclosures without the child or young person's consent in appropriate circumstances. The counsellor will follow the school's Safeguarding policy and in the first instance raise any concerns with the school's designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL). Where possible, the counsellor will keep the child or young person informed and involve them in the process.

In the case of a young person threatening suicide or serious self-harm, there is a general acceptance of the need for intervention even when this involves breaking confidentiality.

The counsellor is **not** required to pass on information about a young person breaking a school rule or committing an offence, unless it could be deemed that by withholding information the counsellor was aiding and abetting a crime (e.g. a young person dealing drugs in school), or placing the child or young person or another person at risk from significant harm.

Data Protection

Data of a child or young person is collected, stored and processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and the expected provisions of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA 2018) as set out in the Data Protection Bill.

There are two prongs of data collection within this policy. The counselling referral forms, which are submitted by teachers, are under the data control of the school and held by the Headmaster/Headmistress. Whereas the counselling notes of the child/young person is in the control of the counsellor, which are held in a secure, safe place away from school premises. These are held until the child is eighteen and held for a further six years thereafter. After this time the document/s are deleted securely and destroyed accordingly as in accordance of Information Commission Office (ICO) and the Data Protection Act 2018.

Operation of the counselling service at St. John's

Pupils can only benefit if they want counselling. Counselling is voluntary.

A link member of staff is the channel for referrals and liaises with the counsellor. The link teacher and the counsellor determine the counselling process. They ensure that

the counselling process is open-ended, which means that the counselling is provided for as long as the counsellor considers that child or young person is continuing to benefit.

The counsellor has uninterrupted access to a reasonably quiet, comfortable room. The counsellor has a secure lockable place to keep case records and the use of a telephone in privacy. The counsellor determines how the appointments are arranged.

What supervision does our school counsellor need?

A professional counsellor is expected to attend regular external consultative supervision. (BACP accreditation currently requires at least 1.5 hours of supervision a month). Counselling without supervision is unethical and will compromise the quality of the work. The school counsellor will attend external consultative supervision.

The counsellor is employed by the school on a consultancy basis.

How does our counsellor evaluate and report back on the service?

Annual Report

The school counsellor will gather data and compile an annual report for the school, giving accurate recorded statistics on:

- Numbers, age, gender and ethnicity of young people referred;
- The length and outcomes of counselling;
- The sorts of issues raised during counselling sessions.

She will be free to make recommendations about the way in which the school can make changes to support young people.

All such feedback will be general and no individual child will be identifiable.

How are parents involved?

Good practice involves working in partnership with parents. In most cases, children and young people are willing to talk to a parent to gain support.

When is parental consent needed?

According to Lord Scarman in the case *Gillick v West Norfolk AHA*, a child under 16 may consent to treatment on their own behalf if, and when, they achieve sufficient maturity and intelligence to understand fully what is proposed and the potential consequences.

Although it has not been tested by the Court, it is generally understood that children of primary school age are unlikely to be 'Gillick competent' and consequently would not be able to give consent which is valid in law.

Many, but not all, of our Senior School pupils may be deemed 'competent' under the Gillick ruling to give consent. However, young people should be offered one or two initial exploratory sessions with the counsellor to outline what is involved, to allow the counsellor and the link professional in school to assess their 'competence' before they commit themselves, and to encourage the young person to agree to their parents being approached for them to have ongoing counselling.

At St. John's School, where a parent withholds consent or the young person may be very distressed and unwilling for the school to approach the parents, counselling can go ahead if the counsellor assesses the young person as Gillick competent to consent in their own right.

If a young person is unwilling to involve their parents and is assessed competent, the young person may give their own written consent for counselling. No specific age is stated in legal guidance – it depends on their capacity to understand the issues involved and to give an informed consent.

'As a general principle, it is legal and acceptable for a young person to ask for confidential counselling without parental consent providing they are of sufficient understanding and intelligence.' (Gillick v West Norfolk AHAH, House of Lords 1985)

Young person's agreement

Assessment of competence based on the Gillick principle depends on:

- The maturity of the young person;
- The young person having sufficient intelligence and understanding to enable them to understand what is being proposed (i.e. counselling); and
- The young person having sufficient intelligence and understanding of the consequences of his or her actions.

The school counsellor, together with the link member of staff for counselling or the Headmaster/Headmistress, will make this assessment.

Review

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis, or earlier if the need arises.

Referral for Counselling

St John's Prep. & Senior School

Name			
Age/DOB			
Ethnicity			Class No.
Referred by:			Date of referral
<p>Preparatory School – Permission needs to be given by parents/carer for counselling to go ahead. Please indicate who has given the permission <input style="border: 1px solid blue; width: 50px; height: 20px; vertical-align: middle;" type="text"/> below.</p> <p>_____</p> <p>If no please obtain before referring. However if the child is distressed, a one off session can be provided until permission is granted.</p> <p>Senior School – If child is Gillick competent the parent's authorisation is not required. The young person is required to put in writing consent for counselling and handed in with the referral form.</p> <p>They can also sign this form as consent. _____ Date _____</p>			
<p>Reason for referral – continue on separate page if required</p> 			
Date passed to Anita:			
YP Seen:			

