



THE KING ALFRED SCHOOL COUNSELLING POLICY

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Signature of Chair of Governors

Signature of Headteacher

Access to professional counselling support is available for young people during difficult and vulnerable periods in their lives. Counselling contributes to tackling barriers to learning which may result from personal experiences.

“Young people and children experience developmental changes that are unique to each individual. Counselling is a process which assists a client to focus on his or her particular concerns and developmental issues, while simultaneously addressing and exploring specific problems, making choices; coping with crises, working through feelings of inner conflict and improving relationships with others. Counselling enables children and young people to gain a better understanding of themselves and the situations facing them and to develop strategies to cope” (BACP 2006).

Rationale

To provide students with an additional support service within the school, contributing to the best possible start in life for pupils by promoting:

- Spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development both in school and in the community.
- Helping to reduce stress levels and promoting emotional wellbeing and inclusion.
- Helping students develop strategies in order to prepare them for the responsibilities and experiences of adult life.
- providing a safe place for reflection and exploration of any issue or distress to assist in developing an understanding and new ways of coping.

Ethics

The school counsellor adheres to the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) code of ethics. All young people are entitled to good standards of practice and care from their practitioner in counselling (BACP 2013).

“Good standards of practice and care require professional competence; good relationships with clients and colleagues; and commitment to and observance of professional ethics” (BACP 2013).

Relevant legislation

This policy is drawn up with regard to the following:

- Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998 which affords young people the right to privacy
- The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child 1989
- The Children Act 1989
- The Education Act 2002
- Green Paper Every Child Matters 2003
- Case Law.
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (HM Government, 2015), made under s.7 of the Local Authority Social Service Act 1970

The rights of children and young people to access confidential counselling

Under the ‘Gillick Principle’ parental consent for counselling is not required for a young person under the age of 16 who is considered Gillick competent. In many cases it is felt that “a young person’s use of counselling is in keeping with adolescent development towards independence.” (Good Practice Guidance pg. 19). In addition, “promoting and maintaining the young person’s entitlement to confidentiality could be seen to be consistent with the LA’s statutory duty ‘to safeguard and promote the welfare of the child’ under s.175 Education Act 2002.” (Good Practice Guidance pg. 20.) The policy document Every Child Matters emphasised, ‘the needs, interests and

welfare of children' as well as the need to develop pastoral care for all children and this is key in the King Alfred School's support of young people.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is essential to the counselling process:

- to enable the young person to develop a trusting relationship with the counsellor.
- to allow the young person to open up and share feelings without fear of blame, reprisal or judgement.
- to allow the young person to speak freely about issues concerning them.
- to encourage others to come forward for counselling.

Problems in maintaining confidentiality are unlikely to occur if there is mutual trust, goodwill and respect between counsellor, school, staff and parents. The young person is free to talk to anyone about their counselling sessions if they wish, but should not be directly questioned by school staff.

The counsellor will not pass on any detailed accounts of counselling sessions, but it may be necessary to communicate periodically with school pastoral staff, with the student's permission.

Where appropriate in supporting the needs of the young person it may be agreed in a pastoral support plan and/or initial contract to liaise with other professionals involved with the young person's permission. .

Sometimes, it may be necessary to liaise with, or refer the young person to another agency for further help. This would only happen with the young person's permission and subject to safeguarding concerns.

Limitations to Confidentiality

An individual's wishes about confidentiality may be overridden by a paramount duty to protect a child's welfare. (A child is defined as anyone under the age of 18, Children Act 1989, 2004).

A school counsellor has a duty to work within the safeguarding children's policy, the child protection procedures of the school and the Child Protection Act 2004.

The statutory duty to 'safeguard and promote the welfare of the child' also extends to protecting young people from harm. The counsellor will follow procedures laid out in the school's Child Protection & Safeguarding Policy and will refer a concern about a child to the designated teacher "where there are strong grounds for thinking that an individual might be at risk of significant harm from themselves or others..." (Good Practice Guidance pg 23.). Adhering to working together to safeguard children (HM Government, 2015). The same will apply where the counsellor has concerns for the welfare of a third party.

It is recognised that at times this will be a difficult judgement which will require the counsellor to balance the promotion of the child's welfare and avoidance of harm against the child's autonomy and trust in the integrity of the counselling relationship. (Good Practice Guidance pg 23.)

The counsellor may seek specialist advice and guidance, from the external counselling supervisor as well as through the local education authority's Help and Advice Service for Child Protection Concerns whilst maintaining confidentiality (Good Practice Guidance pg 23.)

The counsellor will also pass on information as required by law in the event of a disclosure about acts of terrorism or serious crime, or if required to do so by a court order.

Breaching Confidentiality

At the onset of the student/counsellor relationship it will be made clear to the young person when there is a need to breach confidentiality. This may happen when the young person or any other person is deemed to be at risk of significant harm.

The counsellor will discuss this with the young person should the need arise and try to gain their consent to disclosing concerns. Where possible the counsellor will keep them informed and involve them in this process, however it may, even without the students consent, be necessary to disclose information to the Child Protection Officer should the counsellor deem the young person to be at risk.

More minor concerns will remain confidential unless the young person wants them shared in order to seek further help/support.

Working within the School Setting.

Counselling within a school setting is very different from working for other counselling agencies. School counsellors are accountable to the Head Teacher who makes the overall decisions about the sharing of information and also confidentiality. This needs to be dealt with in a sensitive way and always in the best interest of the student.

“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).

The DfE accept that a counselling session will not be inspected or observed by anyone.

Collaboration is crucial; the school counsellor will always liaise with Heads of Year and other identified members of staff. The school Counsellor is part of the inclusion team meetings where multi agencies are working together to safeguard children and families.

All parents can collect or request a counselling leaflet to inform them of the service and the issues associated with confidentiality.

Contracting

The verbal contract is negotiated between the student and counsellor. The verbal contract is reviewed after the initial period of counselling – six weeks. Further counselling sessions can be offered after each review. The verbal contract should be adhered to so both client and counsellors are clear of what the process will involve. The verbal contract should allow the student to become empowered and take responsibility in order to gain fully from the counselling process.

Issues regarding confidentiality should be discussed and clearly understood when creating the initial verbal contract.

Appointment Times

The duration of the counselling sessions will be length of lessons (45 – 50 minutes), with some flexibility to take into account individual student needs. Sessions are held during normal lesson time. However, it is important, that for the duration of the counselling, those sessions are rotated so the student is not missing the same lesson each week.

The student is made aware of the schools procedures for attending a counselling appointment. Whilst respecting the young person's right to confidentiality the school need to ensure the student is attending an appointment in order that they do not appear absent from a lesson. In the student register an appointment is logged in the lesson they are missing. The appointment is not detailed; this could be careers, tutor, support etc. adhering to confidentiality. The young person is made aware of the process at the initial introductory session.

Counselling will take place in the designated 'Counselling Room'.

Supervision

Supervision is on an individual monthly basis as identified in the BACP Professional Standards Code of Practice. This ensures safe practice by allowing space for reflection on the counsellor's work through an external supervisor.

Referrals to the School Counsellor

Students can be:

- Self referred.
- - Referred by Head of Year to the counselling service, parents are informed of referrals made by members of staff with students agreeing at the initial stage of a referral.
- Suggested to the counselling service by a parent, peer or outside agency.
- Referred as part of their Individual Education Plan or Pastoral Support Plan.

Counselling can only take place and be successful if the students themselves are willing participants in the process.

Students will be offered an initial assessment before a verbal counselling contract is put into place. Appointment systems will be as discreet as possible – by way of an e mail to the student and a sealed envelope, through the students tutor in the first instance. Future session times to be agreed during each session.

Students will be encouraged to take responsibility for keeping appointments, and where possible leave a message if they are unable to attend an appointment.

If a session is missed and a message is not received the counsellor will email and/or send a note to the student offering another appointment. This will be done for two weeks, if the student does not attend and no message is received, a final message will be sent terminating the counselling contract, but assuring the student that the service is still open to them to access again in the future should they need it.

There is a drop in session on Wednesday lunchtimes where students can come to make an appointment, pick up a leaflet or have an informal chat with the student counsellor.

The Counsellor will make contact with the student to inform them that they have been added to the waiting list when a referral is received and no appointments are currently available. The student will be contacted when a place becomes available.

Record keeping

All notes of counselling session will be kept securely in accordance with the Data Protection Act. Access to records will be governed by relevant legislation.

Counselling notes will be kept for 3 years after the counselling has ended. After the three year period the notes will be destroyed appropriately adhering to data protection and confidentiality. The Counselling notes are not part of the school records.

The safeguarding lead is responsible for the initial referral records that are allocated during the school triage system to the appropriate professionals.

The school operates a school tracker to store information on all referrals to all professionals within the pastoral team. The school counselling referrals are stored securely on the safeguarding restricted access tracker.

This policy will be reviewed and updated in accordance with any changes in legislation.

References

1. The Gillick principle was established in 1985 when Lord Scarman ruled that ...parental right yields to the child's right to make his own decisions when he reaches a sufficient understanding and intelligence to be capable of making up his own mind on the matter requiring decision. (Good Practice Guidance pg 19.)
2. Good Practice Guidance for Counselling in Schools (4th Edn) 2006 Susan McGinnis with Peter Jenkins BACP.
3. Every Child Matters 2003 Paul Boateng Cm 5860. London: Stationery office.
4. Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling & Psychotherapy (Revised edition) 2013 www.bacp.co.uk
5. HM Government (2015) Working together to safeguard children: a guide to interagency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. Norwich: the Stationery Office. Available at https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/419595/Working_Together_to_Safeguard_Children.pdf (accessed 30 September 2016).