St Mary's School
CAMBRIDGE

Counselling Service Policy

This policy is the responsibility of the School Counsellor, Head and Deputy Head (Pastoral and Boarding)

Last review: May 26

Next review: May 27

Overview

St Mary's, Cambridge (the School) employs a counsellor who is qualified and holds membership and accreditation with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) – a leading professional psychotherapy and counselling association in the United Kingdom.

The counsellor has experience of working with young people and provide an approachable presence encouraging of a climate for safe and trusting relationships. The School counsellor is bound by their professional frameworks for good practice and works in accordance with a strict code of ethics, which requires confidentiality, accountability, clinical supervision and continuing professional development. In accordance with the BACP, the School counsellor attends regular and ongoing supervision, with an appropriately trained counselling professional, who is external to the School, for the purpose of ensuring best practice and accountability. When discussing issues relating to a particular pupil during supervision, the counsellor will take great care not to reveal the full name of the pupil or disclose any information that would enable the pupil and their family to be identified.

This policy is based upon the following guidance:

Good Practice in Action 002 Legal Resource: *Counselling children and young people in school contexts in England, Northern Ireland and Wales* is published by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, BACP House, 15 St John's Business Park, Lutterworth, Leicestershire, LE17 4HB.

Referral

The system of referral for an initial appointment to the School Counsellor is via the following routes: boarders are referred by the Head of Boarding or doctors at Lensfield Medical Practice and day pupils are referred by the School nurses, by the Deputy Head Pastoral or another member of staff such as a Head of Year via the nurses. Pupils may also self-refer, by talking to the nurses or by emailing the counsellor directly. There is also a link for students to access on the student wellbeing pages.

A brief assessment will take place between those involved in the referral to decide if counselling would be appropriate. The pupil will be offered an introductory session to decide if they would like to work with the Counsellor, after which the pupil will be offered up to six sessions. At the end of the six sessions a second review will take place. If needed, any onwards referral may be made in conjunction with the pupils wishes. Pupils are not obliged to complete the six sessions if issues or concerns feel resolved before then. If a pupil wishes to end the sessions, we advise they discuss their wishes with their counsellor. If the Counsellor feels the pupil is not using their time well; she will terminate the sessions.

If the pupil or the Counsellor feels that the provision is not helpful or appropriate, the Counsellor will strongly recommend that the pupil makes an appointment to see her own GP. If she is over 16, she can self-refer; if she is under 16, the parent will generally make the appointment.

Accessing the counselling service

Counselling sessions are booked directly between the counsellor and pupil and are confirmed via school email. The counsellor will send the pupil appointment reminders the day before the agreed session time. Appointments take place during the school day and last the duration of one school period. Pupils meet with the Counsellor in the counsellor's room, which is in the Wellbeing Hub.

Confidentiality

Counselling confidentiality is a key aspect of therapeutic work in providing space for the pupil to explore difficult issues and make choices for themselves in an atmosphere of privacy and trust. The main reasons for pupils seeking counselling tend to be family or friendship concerns, anxiety, bereavement, self-harm, low self-esteem and eating disorders. Hence, counselling is confidential to the counsellor and the pupil. The Counsellor has the same level of confidentiality as members of the medical profession. BACP guidelines endorse this principle and hence at School we are bound to guarantee pupil confidentiality.

The Gillick Principle recommends that all young people who know their own mind and are therefore able to exercise judgement are free to request counselling without their parents' consent or against their parent(s)'s wishes. According to Lord Scarman: *'…parental right yields to the pupil'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.'*

Thus, parents are not informed of counselling if the pupils do not wish to give consent; at times it is family issues that are of concern and if the parents were to know then the pupil would not wish to attend counselling sessions. The School retains the right to notify the Counsellor without informing parents if we deem this to be in the pupil's best interest. Any person making a referral will strongly suggest to the pupil that they talk to their parents. At times, a pupil may request a school nurse call a parent on their behalf.

Whenever it is decided that information is to be shared, the pupil will be involved, on the principle of supporting their autonomy. The sharing of the information should firstly be the responsibility of the young pupil, with the support of the Counsellor, or a member of School staff, if that is requested. The Counsellor is unable to engage in dialogue with parents without the prior consent of the pupil which includes the confirmation of attendance at counselling and any material discussed in sessions. The Counsellor will inform the Deputy Head Pastoral and Boarding that such contact is being made ahead of the information being shared so that any support that is necessary can be offered, this can be done without the exact needs of the pupil being revealed. At all times, the Counsellor will follow the School's policies on contact with parents.

At School we have decided that the pupil's right to confidentiality as established by Gillick also extends to the right of privacy of information concerning her attendance at counselling. In general, where information revealing the identity of pupils attending counselling is passed on to someone who has not made the initial referral (and this could include the Headmistress), disclosing such information only applies to attendance at counselling sessions and not to the actual content of the sessions.

Safeguarding

The need to safeguard pupils will always take precedence over the pupil's right to autonomy and confidentiality. Hence confidentiality *can* be overridden in cases where the Counsellor deems appropriate i.e., in the pupil's best interest to protect her whereby significant risk of harm either to that individual or others is identified, which would require that this information be shared directly with senior management. The Counsellor will explain procedures and possible

consequent involvement with other agencies and seek the pupil's view and consent. Sharing of information that involves a breach of confidentiality will be kept to a minimum and concerned only with the issues at hand.

There is a general acceptance of the need for an interventionist strategy in such extreme cases as a suicide threat or similar action even when this involves breaking confidentiality. The Counsellor will seek appropriate and immediate medical help for the young person. Those with parental responsibility for the pupil will be informed unless there is alleged abuse. Serious issues including child protection issues will always be referred on and the Head and the Deputy Head Pastoral and Boarding will always be informed.

Attendance

School procedures mean that pupils attending counselling during lesson time need to have their whereabouts accounted for. Pupils are required to report to reception on their way up to the medical centre and to sign in upon arrival, so that their where abouts can be traced.

It is the pupil's responsibility to inform their Counsellor ahead of the session if they are unable to attend. Sessions can be rescheduled if due warning is given, or if a pupil is absent from school. If the pupil chooses not to attend a session without prior agreement, this will count as one of their six sessions.