

## **Counselling Service Policy for Devizes School**

*active body, active mind*



The counselling service aims to build on the school's pastoral provision by offering additional personal support to students who may benefit from the opportunity to work with a professional counsellor. This confidential service helps promote the psychological well-being of students, enabling them to make the most of the opportunities offered for their social and academic development.

The counselling support provided conforms to the current best practice and professional standards for school based counselling, specifically in respect of counsellor qualifications, continual professional development, supervision policy and safe working practices.

The school's counsellor is a member of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), works within their guidelines and is bound by their Ethical Framework and Professional Conduct Procedure. Further information can be found at [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk)

Students can access the service during term time on Thursdays and Fridays between 9am and 3pm. The service is free.

### **What is counselling?**

Counselling is a way of helping through a process of talking, listening and empowerment. The process enables clients to focus on their particular concerns, work through feelings of inner conflict and gain a greater understanding of themselves and their situation. It can relieve emotional tension and enable a greater capacity for coping and enjoying life. The counsellor does not generally offer advice.

Students are provided with a safe place to express their feelings and thoughts about what they perceive to be an issue in their life. Bereavement, loss, family, and peer relationship difficulties, anxiety and bullying are major issues which without support may lead to deterioration of behaviour, attitude and mental health.

### **Referrals and Assessments**

Students may self-refer or with their consent be referred by another person e.g. parent, teacher, doctor, nurse or friend.

If a pupil or a pupil's family are known to the counsellor another counsellor will be sought.

Initial contact for appointments is usually made directly with the counsellor. Students have access to a drop-in service where they can meet the counsellor and request an appointment. Alternatively students can speak to any member of staff who can make an appointment on their behalf.

Staff can also refer, in consultation with and with the consent of the student.

Once a referral has been made the counsellor and student will meet for an initial assessment session. This is important to identify the needs of the student and ensure they are there

voluntarily. Successful counselling is based on trust, self-motivation and commitment. The counsellor is generally unwilling to engage in a counselling relationship with a pupil who is there under coercion or as a condition of disciplinary procedures. Unless the student being referred has openly and willingly agreed to the arrangement, counselling is likely to be of little use.

The assessment session also provides an opportunity for the student and the counsellor to decide on the best course of action. Students can come for counselling for as long as is required. This can vary between a one-off session to offload, or may lead to weekly sessions throughout the term. The timing of sessions is arranged to cause as little disruption to lessons as is possible.

Where appropriate the counsellor will, with the student's consent make any necessary referrals to other agencies e.g. medical services, psychiatrists, social services or other external agencies and/or liaise with other members of staff.

Appointments are usually one-to-one and last around 45 minutes, although they may be shorter or longer as appropriate.

### **Confidentiality**

All young people are entitled to confidentiality as outlined by the BACP Code of Ethics. This is vital in enabling young people to express their distress in counselling. Whilst acknowledging that confidentiality is crucial it cannot be absolute in any counselling relationship. Limits to confidentiality will be explained to clients at the beginning of the counselling relationship and periodically thereafter as required.

The need to protect students is sensitively weighed against their right to privacy and confidentiality. In the case of a potential child protection concern, events may develop that could lead to the Counsellor considering that a breach of confidentiality is necessary in the interest of the young person's safety. This relates to situations when the Counsellor has strong grounds for thinking that an individual (either the client or another young person) may be at risk of significant harm from others or themselves. The Counsellor will endeavour to seek the young person's views and consent in advance of any disclosure of information and explain the possible consequences of involvement with other agencies.

Any sharing of information involving a breach of confidentiality will be kept to minimum and will be concerned only with the issues at hand and not extend to other areas of the client's present or past life. Thought will be given as to whether historical abuse has implications for the safety of the young person concerned and/or any other children/young people.

Where a young person is at risk of significant harm the counsellor is required to initiate the school's child protection procedure.

Whilst every effort is made it is not always possible to protect the identity of students who attend counselling. Because of the nature of the environment in which they are being seen privacy regarding attendance may be difficult. This is explained to students at the beginning

of the counselling relationship and it is the student's decision whether to continue with further sessions.

### **The Gillick Principle**

"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 AHA, House of Lords, 1985)

Since this ruling all young people are entitled to confidential counselling. *Gillick competence* will be assessed by the counsellor in the primary meeting with the student and if deemed competent the young person will be able to give consent to counselling. Assessment of competence based on the Gillick principle depends on the maturity of the young person, their understanding of the consequences of his or her actions, and the young person having sufficient understanding and intelligence to enable them to understand what is being proposed i.e. counselling.

As a rule most secondary students are deemed sufficiently competent enough to understand the counselling process. Where this is not the case, parental consent is obtained.

For further information about our student counselling service please contact: The Assistant Head for Inclusion at Devizes School

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