

Counselling at Wrotham School

What is counselling and how can it help children and young people?

Counselling is an intervention that children or young people can voluntarily enter into if they want to explore, understand and overcome issues in their lives which may be causing them difficulty, distress and/or confusion. A counselling relationship has identified boundaries and an explicit contract agreed between the young person, counsellor and, where appropriate, parent or carer. Good mental and emotional wellbeing is an integral part of children and young people's holistic development. When this development is inhibited, counselling can be an effective and important resource. The aims of counselling are to: assist the child or young person to achieve a greater understanding of themselves and their relationship to their world; to create a greater awareness and utilisation of their personal resources; to build their resilience; and to support their ability to address problems and pursue personally meaningful goals.

What is school based counselling?

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) define school based counselling as: 'a professional activity delivered by qualified practitioners in schools. Counsellors offer troubled and/or distressed children and young people an opportunity to talk about their difficulties, within a relationship of agreed confidentiality.'

How can school based counselling help children and young people?

Counselling can be beneficial in a number of ways, for example it can help:

- reduce the psychological distress that children and young people may experience as a result of facing a range of life difficulties, such as being bullied or experiencing bereavement;
- support young people who are having difficulties within relationships, for example, with family or with friends;
- young people who are having difficulty managing their emotions, such as anger; and
- as part of a graduated response to decide whether or not to put SEN support in place where difficulties are caused by events such as bullying or bereavement.

Many students report improvements in their capacity to study and learn following counselling and frequently report that counselling helps them to concentrate. Students also report an increased motivation for school and schoolwork. Headteachers and pastoral teams are also supportive of counselling in helping students to study and learn, particularly in facilitating the young person's ability to concentrate in class, as well as increasing their attendance at school and improving behaviour.

Evidence indicates that in secondary schools the most frequent issue that young people present to school based counselling, as recorded by their counsellor, is family issues. Anger is the second most common presenting issue, and is significantly more common for males, with about one quarter of all

males presenting with this difficulty. 'Behaviour' is another common presenting issue at school based counselling; as are bereavement, bullying, self-worth and relationships in general. For the young people themselves, the most frequent goal they wish to work on when coming to counselling is increasing self-confidence and self-acceptance.

There are a number of ways in which we use our school use counselling service, including to complement and support other services. The key areas are:

- as a preventative intervention. School staff, parents or carers, or other adults close to the child or young person may identify that there are emerging signs of behavioural change (for instance, drug and alcohol misuse, or dis-engagement with learning). Consequently they may refer the child or young person, with their informed consent (and in line with the individual school's procedures) to counselling to explore and make more positive, goal-orientated choices;
- for assessment purposes. A suitably qualified counsellor can provide an assessment of a child or young person which includes an assessment of risk, and identify with them an appropriate way forward, including considering goals which they may want to achieve (which may be to do with any aspect of their lives). The agreed way forward may be ongoing counselling, but may also be watchful waiting or a recommendation through agreed school routes that a referral to other statutory or voluntary services would be appropriate; as an early intervention measure. Children or young people themselves, or the adults around them, might identify a problem and refer them to counselling. A counsellor will work with the child or young person to help them address their problem(s) and reduce their psychological distress;
- a parallel support alongside specialist CAMHS. Some children and young people may attend counselling while they are also attending specialist mental health services. Sometimes resource constraints can mean that specialist mental health service appointments are not as frequent as the service and/or the child or young person and parents or carers would like. Here, a school counsellor can support the child or young person in between specialist mental health service appointments, or while waiting for treatment to begin. Each service should know that the other is involved and communicate any significant developments to them (normally with the child or young person's and parent's or carer's permission); and
- a tapering or step down of intervention when a case is closed by specialist mental health services. Sometimes, when a specialist mental health service intervention is completed, a child or young person may attend counselling within school as a further support which consolidates the work of the specialist mental health service. Counselling, too, is tapered and stepped down to an end. However, should the problems escalate, a fast track communication and referral can operate between counselling and specialist mental health services.
- to learn coping mechanisms to overcome feelings of anxiety, anger, grief or challenges within friendship groups or with particular behaviours.
- to work with the child and their family as mediation to resolve conflict

At each stage of school based counselling, and no matter how a referral was made, the child or young person should work with the counsellor's support to find their own answers to their difficulties. Some children and young people may not want to see a counsellor in their school and our school will in this instance provide the student and/or their parents/carers with information about other sources of help in the local community.

How are students referred for the in-school counselling service?

A student can be referred for counselling by:

- the Safeguarding Lead
- a Progress Leader or Deputy Progress Leader
- a parent via the Safeguarding Lead or the Progress Team
- self-referral via the Progress Team or directly with the School Counsellor

The Safeguarding team, Progress Leaders and the SENCo meet weekly to review the waiting list and decide which students will benefit most from seeing the school counsellor. Where it is possible to help a small number of students together the team will suggest a therapy group. The Safeguarding Lead, as line manager for the School Counsellor, meets with her weekly to review student progress, completion dates and any requirements for on-going support from the pastoral team.

Will I always be informed if my child is referred to the school counsellor?

It is recommended and encouraged that a student should tell their parents about any involvement they have in the counselling process. However, if a student wishes to speak with a counsellor without parental consent, an assessment using the Fraser Guidelines will be used to decide if the student is Gillick competent and therefore able to access counselling without their parents' knowledge. The criteria for assessing Gillick competency as set out in the Fraser Guidelines include:

- The maturity of the student
- Sufficient intelligence and understanding to enable the student to understand what is being proposed (ie. Counselling)
- Sufficient intelligence and understanding of the consequences of the proposed action; and
- The potential deterioration in mental health if access to counselling is not provided.

The assessment for Gillick competency set out by the BACP'S 'Good Practice Guidance for Counselling in Schools' can be found in Appendix 1. If a student is deemed to be Gillick competent, the student and the counsellor do not have to inform parents that counselling has taken place. If a student is deemed not to be Gillick competent, written consent from the student's parent/legal guardian will be required before the counselling process can begin.

Confidentiality

The contents of each counselling session is confidential between the counsellor and the student unless the student's welfare or safety, or that of another, is considered to be at risk of significant harm. In this instance the necessary information is shared with the Safeguarding Lead who will speak with the student and make a decision on any further action to be taken. The Safeguarding Lead will share this information with the student's parents unless doing so is considered to be putting the student at risk.

Complaints

Any complaints about the counselling service delivered at Wrotham School should be directed to the Safeguarding Lead. If the complaint is in relation to the Safeguarding Lead, it should be directed to the Headteacher. Any complaints about the School's counselling provision will be dealt with according to the School's Parental Complaints Procedure Policy.

Key Contacts:

Safeguarding lead: Mr M Cater

mcater@wrotham.kent.sch.uk

Safeguarding Officer KS3 – Mrs K Fielder

kfielder@wrotham.kent.sch.uk

Safeguarding Officer KS4 – Miss B Williamson

bwilliamson@wrotham.kent.sch.uk

Acknowledgements

This policy is largely based upon the Department for Education's 'Counselling in Schools: a blueprint for the future' (March 2015) and the BACP's 'Good practice guidance for counselling in schools', 4th edition (2006).

Appendix 1: Gillick Test

PARENTAL CONSENT REQUEST FOR COUNSELLING

Parental consent will be requested for any student wishing to receive counselling who is considered not to be 'Gillick competent'. In the case of parents who live at separate addresses, the request for parental consent will be sent to the first contact on the most recent data collection form submitted at the start of each academic year. If Parental Responsibility is held by persons other than the student's biological parents, it is their responsibility to inform the school of these circumstances and any parental consent requests will be sought from them.

Factors to consider	Checklist for questions
Immediate issues	
Child's age Gillick Test:	How old is the child or young person? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the child or young person understand the counselling or advice? • Are they refusing to allow their parents to be involved? • Do their best interests require that the advice or counselling be given without parental consent?
Short-term issues	
Nature of contact: Support systems: Nature of immediate issue or problem: Safeguarding responsibilities:	Is the contact with the counsellor controlled entirely by the child or young person? (e.g. emergency phone calls, drop-in centre) What support does the child or young person have access to alongside or in the place of counselling or therapy, should contact be broken or withdrawn? What is the degree of risk, if any, posed by the child to him or herself or to others (e.g. drugs, abuse, suicide, arson?) Is the risk significant, immediate or longer term? Is the counsellor required by their conditions of employment, or agency policy, to report all suspected child abuse to social services?
Longer-term issues	
Stage of cognitive and emotional development:	Does the child or young person understand a) the nature of the issue or problem? b) their own needs and the needs of others? c) the risks and benefits of counselling or therapy? Does the child or young person have a) a sense of their own identity? b) a sense of time, past, present and future?
Source: Jenkins, 1997: 216-7 (abbreviated version)	