

# Counselling policy

Action	Policy to be reviewed annually		
	Owner	Date	Completed
Review	Sandrine Paillasse	December 2019	✓
Reported	Education Committee	4 February 2020	✓
Approved	Board of Governors	24 March 2020	✓

## To be published on the following:

Staff Portal	✓
School website	✓



## **Counselling policy**

The school provides a confidential counselling service for all students. The wellbeing team is made of:

- a school counsellor
- an art therapist
- a coach, who also practises Tension Release Exercises (TRE ®).
- a trainee therapist
- the learning support coordinator
- the medical staff (two nurses, a school doctor)

The wellbeing team is line managed by the Director of Pastoral Care.

## **What is counselling?**

The British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy definition of counselling / psychotherapy states that "Counselling and psychotherapy are umbrella terms that cover a range of talking therapies. They are delivered by trained practitioners who work with people over a short or long term to help them bring about effective change or enhance their wellbeing<sup>1</sup>."

## **What the therapists can do**

- Offer a safe and confidential space to help explore emotionally-based problems in one-to-one sessions
- Help you make sense of your world
- Help you to explore feelings and thoughts, in order to resolve emotional distress
- Help you towards a better understanding of self and others, which in turn may lead to an improved ability to relate to others.

The counsellors and coach also facilitate pupil group discussions, on issues pertinent to the students' school experiences (resilience, sleep, anger, stress management, gender issues; relationship and friendship issues; self-esteem; grief etc.).

## **What the coach can do**

- Provide emotional support and foster a safe and successful learning environment for students.
- Use positive communication strategies and coaching techniques to motivate pupils to work on and reach their goals.
- Assist pupils in dealing effectively with and understanding their own social skills challenges and how they can make changes in order to meet their goals.

The coach is also a trained TRE® (Tension Release Exercises) provider and may do body work with pupils depending on the presenting needs.

## **How long can students see the counsellor / coach for?**

At an initial meeting with a counsellor, there should be an assessment of the needs of the student. This should lead to a shared decision about whether counselling/coaching is the most appropriate way forward, and/or whether the student should be referred on for a more comprehensive assessment of their mental health by specialist services. Generally, 6 sessions will be offered. Upon review, if it is felt that the student would benefit from further session, the counsellor may offer to continue see the student.

If the wellbeing team deems that the student, or others, are at risk of harm, an external referral may be decided.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.bacp.co.uk/media/1917/bacp-choosing-counsellor-psychotherapist-c3.pdf>

## Staff

As a school we are committed to ensuring the highest levels of staff wellbeing. This is monitored through a wellbeing survey, and regular informal and formal conversations, for example the PDR process and staff committees. The counselling service in school (including a trainee therapist) is accessible for staff in emergency situations (work or non-work related) and as a sign-posting service while support is gained outside school. The member of staff is encouraged to discuss this with the Director of People and Diversity. The counsellor will inform the Director of People and Diversity of their client list. The school can offer up to 6 sessions in school (at the discretion of the Director of People and Diversity, in liaison with the Director of Pastoral Care) although this may not always be possible if space is limited. In addition to the in-house counselling service the school also works with Marsh Education which offers a free confidential counselling service, 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. These counsellors are members of The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. Staff can also seek support from the School Chaplain.

24-hour counselling helpline: 0117 933 0687

## The impact of counselling

In certain instances, students can feel worse as counselling goes on. Students will experience a level of internal conflict: on the one hand they want to change and feel better; on the other hand, the unwell part is frightened of change and resists it. Counselling may also stir up difficult and complex emotions which have not been talked about before; this may also make students feel worse before they feel better<sup>2</sup>.

This is a normal process; counselling may not bring about immediate change. Students, and parents, must be aware that the counselling process may take several weeks or even longer. It may be that an external referral is needed, for long-term counselling.

At the start of a counselling course, and at other points throughout, students will be asked by their counsellor to complete a wellbeing questionnaire (Warwick Edinburgh mental wellbeing scale), the results of which will be confidential to the counsellor.

Upon ending a course of counselling, students will be invited to complete an ending questionnaire about the service they have received. The information is confidential to the Director of Pastoral Care.

## Booking

Students may self-refer, by using the booking system on the [portal](#).

Members of staff may suggest that a pupil might benefit from seeing the counsellor/coach. Parents may also request that their daughter sees the counsellor. In either case, the counsellor/coach will offer the student an appointment, but the student will be under no obligation to accept it, unless the concern is of a safeguarding nature, such as self-harm or suicidal thoughts.

Heads of Year may consult with the counsellor about concerns they have about individual students or groups of students.

## Confidentiality

Students may arrange to see the counsellors or coach on their own initiative in confidence. Parental permission is not sought; the counsellors use the Gillick competency guidelines<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://welldoing.org/article/in-therapy-why-you-might-feel-worse-before-you-feel-better>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.nspcc.org.uk/preventing-abuse/child-protection-system/legal-definition-child-rights-law/gillick-competency-fraser-guidelines/>  
<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/consent-to-treatment/children/>

Pastoral systems within the school have responsibility for the wider welfare of students; counselling services should therefore be considered within this context. The wellbeing team use a 'team around the child' approach. The team and the Director of Pastoral regularly review caseloads and presenting problems to ensure the school adopts a proactive approach when addressing mental health issues. This means that the Director of Pastoral Care and the wellbeing team will know the identity of students who use the service. This information remains confidential; it may be shared with the Heads of Year, but only if it is felt that it would help support the student. The content of the sessions, however, is confidential.

**In exceptional circumstances where there are Child Protection issues or where a student appears to be at serious risk, the counsellor/coach may have to inform the School's designated safeguarding lead (DSL), or other appropriate individuals or agencies, of what is discussed in the sessions.** The counsellor/coach will only inform another person of anything that a pupil discloses with the pupil's prior knowledge that she has to do so. The counsellor/coach should also discuss with the Director of Pastoral Care individuals who appear to have seriously breached school rules.

**Parents are not informed that a student is seeing the counsellor, unless there is a safeguarding concern.** The counsellor will, in the initial sessions, discuss with the student how to approach the issue with parents, if it is deemed this would help the student.

## **Parental expectations**

If parents are informed that their daughter is seeing a counsellor, they may expect the following:

- Meeting or phone call with the Director of Pastoral Care / Head of Year to discuss the welfare of their daughter
- Communication from the Director of Pastoral Care / Head of Year if a risk arises; before half-term or holiday
- Regular communication from the Head of Year (no less than monthly)

**It is important that parents understand that the content of the sessions will not be discussed with them. In order for the therapeutic relationship to be preserved, parents do not normally meet the counsellors. The Director of Pastoral Care / Head of Year act as intermediaries, so that the counsellors may concentrate on working with students. However, if the pupil feels it would help them, a meeting may be set up.**

Confidentiality is a key facet of the counselling service. Pupils need to feel that they can trust the counsellor/coach with difficult and painful issues so that the work will not be hindered by concerns about confidentiality.

## **Availability of this policy**

A copy of this policy may be downloaded from our website <http://www.spgs.org/what-we-offer/policies> or is available on request from the school office, St Paul's Girls' School, Brook Green, London, W6 7BS (tel: 0207 603 2288). This policy can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required.