

Counselling policy

Action	Policy to be reviewed annually		
	Owner	Date	Completed
Review	Director of Pastoral Care	January 2022	✓
Approved	SMT	1 March 2022	✓

To be published on the following:	
Staff Portal	✓
School website	✓



1. Counselling policy

1.1 The school provides a confidential counselling service for all students. The Wellbeing Team is made of:

- A Lead Counsellor who supervises a team of staff and student counsellors,
- a coach, who also practises Tension Release Exercises (TRE[®])
- an Independent Listener (who is also a qualified counsellor and coach)
- the learning support coordinator, and an assistant
- the medical staff (two nurses, a school doctor)
- DSL and DDSLs
- the Chaplain

1.2 The Wellbeing Team is line managed by the Director of Pastoral Care.

2. What is counselling?

2.1 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 wellbeing¹.”

3. Therapists

3.1 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.

3.2 The counsellors and coach also facilitate student 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.).

4. Coaches

4.1 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 students to work on and reach their goals.
- Assist students in dealing effectively with and understanding their own social skills challenges and how they can make changes in order to meet their goals.

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

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

5. How long can students see the counsellor / coach for?

5.1 At an initial meeting, the student will be triaged, to assess their needs. 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 external specialist services. Generally, 6-8 sessions will be offered. Upon review, if it is felt that the student would benefit from further sessions, the counsellor may offer to continue see the student. Students can also seek non-counselling support from other members of the Wellbeing Team.

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

6. Staff

6.1 As a school we are committed to ensuring the highest levels of staff wellbeing. This is monitored through a wellbeing survey, the Staff Wellbeing Strategy and regular informal and formal conversations, for example the PDR process and staff committees. The Staff Counsellor service in school 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 also to discuss this with the Director of Pastoral Care and HR, as appropriate. The meetings are confidential unless safeguarding concerns emerge, at which point the Staff Counsellor will inform the High Mistress. The school can offer up to 8 sessions in school (at the discretion of 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, for staff and their families. 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 Staff Wellbeing Strategy also offers further helplines and websites for support.

7. The impact of counselling

7.1 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 better².

7.2 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.

7.3 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 and the Director of Pastoral Care.

7.4 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.

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

8. Booking

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

8.2 Members of staff may suggest that a student might benefit from seeing the counsellor/coach. Parents may also request that their child sees the counsellor. In either case, students will be triaged and directed towards a counsellor/coach who 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.

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

9. Confidentiality

9.1 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 guidelines³.

9.2 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 Care 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.

9.3 **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 student discloses with the student's prior knowledge that they have to do so. The counsellor/coach should also discuss with the Director of Pastoral Care individuals who appear to have seriously breached school rules.

9.4 **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. They may also liaise with the Head of Year and the Director of Pastoral Care if the student agrees.

10. Parental expectations

10.1 If parents are informed that their child 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 child
- 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).

10.2 **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**

³ <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/>

intermediaries, so that the counsellors may concentrate on working with students. However, if the student feels it would help them, a meeting may be set up.

10.3 Confidentiality is a key facet of the counselling service. Students 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.

11. COVID-19

11.1 This is still the over-arching policy during the period of the pandemic.

11.2 The procedures remain the same, except that all consultations are now on-line.

11.3 From January 2021, a new drop-in service is being established whereby students can make 15-minute appointments every day via the student portal. This is to widen the access to the service and to allow students the chance to see a counsellor/coach more readily, especially if longer appointments are only available via the waiting list.

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: 020 7603 2288). This policy can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required.