

Counselling policy

Action	Policy to be reviewed biennially		
	Owner	Date	Completed
Review	Director of Pastoral Care	January 2024	✓
Approved	SMT	February 2024	✓
Next Review		Spring 2026	

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



Counselling policy

Who this policy applies to

This policy applies to all members of the school's community, including students, parents, employees, temporary staff, contractors, agency workers, visiting music teachers and other peripatetic workers, volunteers, governors and all other people when working in or for the school. It applies whenever staff or volunteers are working with students, even where this is away from the school, e.g., on a school trip.

What this policy is for

This policy aims to:

- Describe how the counselling service operates
- set out the framework within which the counselling service operates

Other relevant school policies

- Safeguarding Policy

Content of policy

1. Introduction
2. What is counselling?
3. Therapists
4. How long can students see the counsellor?
5. Staff
6. The impact of counselling
7. Booking
8. Confidentiality
9. Parental expectations

Counselling policy

1. Introduction

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

- A Lead Counsellor who sees students and supervises a team of staff and student counsellors,
- A team of staff and student counsellors
- the learning support coordinator, and their assistants
- the medical staff
- 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 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 make sense of your world
- Help to explore feelings and thoughts, in order to resolve emotional distress
- Help 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 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. How long can students see the counsellor for?

4.1 At an initial meeting, the student will be triaged, to assess their needs. This should lead to a shared decision about whether counselling 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.

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

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

5. Staff

5.1 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 (and other significant) 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 DSL who 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.

6. The impact of counselling

6.1 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.

6.2 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.

6.3 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. Booking

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

7.2 Members of staff may suggest that a student might benefit from seeing a counsellor. Parents may also request that their child sees the counsellor. In either case, students will be triaged and directed towards a counsellor who will offer the student an appointment, but the student will be under no obligation to accept it.

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

8. Confidentiality

8.1 Students may arrange to see the counsellors on their own initiative in confidence. Parental permission is not sought; the counsellors use the Gillick competency guidelines³.

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

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/>

8.2 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.

8.3 In exceptional circumstances where there are Child Protection issues or where a student appears to be at serious risk, the counsellor 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 will only inform another person of anything that a student discloses with the student's prior knowledge that they have to do so.

8.4 Parents are not informed that a student is seeing the counsellor unless there is a safeguarding concern – or an emergent SEND concern- which in the opinion of the DSL necessitates informing parents. 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, the DSL and the Director of Pastoral Care if the student agrees.

9. Parental expectations

9.1 If parents are informed that their child is seeing a counsellor, the school will ensure that there is regular communication between the pastoral team and parents to work together to act in the best interests of the child.

9.2 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 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.

9.3 Confidentiality is a key facet of the counselling service. Students need to feel that they can trust the counsellor 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: 020 7603 2288). This policy can be made available in large print or other accessible format if required.