

Forest Hill School Counselling policy

Counselling provides a structured time and space for students to explore worries and concerns and reflect upon things that are troubling them. Students are offered a chance to understand and manage difficult thoughts and feelings and to discover new ways of responding to situations or people they are finding difficult. The counselling service is open to all students, who should expect to be treated seriously and listened to respectfully.

The counsellor, however, reserves the right to refuse to see a student after an initial assessment period, who she believes cannot make use of the service or who sees counselling as a means of avoiding lessons. A student who is seeing another counsellor or mental health professional outside school would not normally be able to see the school counsellor as well.

Many students self-refer, with or without some encouragement from a member of staff. Whilst they are strongly encouraged to discuss this with their parents or carers, there is no obligation on the school to pass this information on. Parents/Carers of students from Year 7 who self-refer and undertake work with the counsellor that is more than the initial 6 sessions offered, will be informed by the counsellor of this in writing – the content of the sessions will remain confidential.

The counsellor will make every effort to make parents aware of the service and to enlist their support, and students are always encouraged to tell their parents that they have seen the counsellor. However, as long as the young person is **12 years or older**, and is assessed as being of sufficient understanding and intelligence (Lord Scarman: Gillick v. West 1985), their right to confidential counselling takes precedence over parental rights (see appendix).

Where students are referred by a member of staff via the Head of House, parents will be consulted (Years 7 and 8) or informed (Years 9 – 11). The counsellor will inform Heads of House of the identities of students in their house who have self-referred, but the content of the sessions remain confidential.

Counselling sessions are normally weekly during term time, although at busy times the counsellor may operate an eight or nine-day week in order to meet demand. Some students prefer to come less frequently and may choose to come fortnightly or even for a half-termly “check-up”. The counsellor will aim to keep one period a day available for new or emergency clients, so that no one is kept waiting for an initial appointment more than a week. A waiting list system will operate thereafter as and when necessary.

Ongoing appointments are booked for the following week, trying to avoid important or favourite lessons and cooperating with any expressed child, teacher or parental preference. Rotating times and changing days help to ensure that the same lesson is not repeatedly missed. Students are never taken from double PE classes. With their permission, students can be reminded of their session by their tutor during

Morning/Afternoon Registration or fetched from class if they forget their appointment. Sixth form students can arrange a regular weekly appointment at a time when they do not have classes. At the start of a counselling session the counsellor will mark the electronic register so the teacher knows where the child is.

Initially, students are offered up to six sessions, and the counselling is reviewed with each client before every half term or holiday break. During this time the counsellor and client will agree together whether to continue with further sessions.

Where the counsellor feels that family therapy would be helpful or there are serious concerns about the student's mental health, a referral is made to an appropriate outside agency – usually the local CAMHS. Parents will be involved at this stage. Child Protection issues are referred in the first instance, to Iain Haresign, Deputy Head Teacher. If Mr Haresign is not available, Jillian Jones (Education Welfare) or Helen Sheehan (SENCO) will be the next point of contact.

School Staff, both teaching and non-teaching, can access the counsellor as well and are offered up to three sessions. Time will be taken to explore options around other help available outside school. Difficult boundary issues are raised when offering staff longer term counselling as the service is intended primarily for students. However, staff are welcome to consult the counsellor on any matter to do with the emotional well-being of the students.

Parents/carers can use the service to consult over concerns about their child. However, if the counsellor is seeing their son/daughter for counselling, parents/carers are reminded that the service is confidential and the counsellor will not tell them what has been discussed in sessions without expressed consent from the student concerned. The counsellor will tell the student if she has been involved in discussions with parents/carers concerning him/her.

General statistical data on each client is recorded anonymously. These details are collated at the end of each academic year and are available to staff and parents, along with an annual report on the service. In addition, as part of service evaluation, the counsellor will from time to time send out an anonymous questionnaire to clients.

Confidential records are kept securely by the counsellor, separate from other information held by school on the student. These consist of individual record sheets for each client, recording essential information, contacts made, action taken and an outline of issues discussed. These will be shredded one year after the student has left Forest Hill or SFH6. Confidentiality and data protection are covered in the first session and agreed to by every client. Other leaflets are: *Seeing a counsellor – what should I expect?* *Code of Practice: confidentiality and data protection.*

As well as being available to individual students, the counsellor is involved in other aspects of school life, contributing to the pastoral care and emotional well-being of the wider school community. She visits PHSCE classes to run sessions on counselling and

mental health, is involved in staff development, co-facilitates a Reflective Practitioner group for staff and organises parents' meetings on themes pertinent to adolescence.

The counsellor is a Registered member of the BACP and works to the BACP Ethical Framework for Good Practice. School pays for regular counselling supervision and supports appropriate continuing professional development.

Appendix

Assessment of sufficient understanding and intelligence (Gillick competence)

The counsellor will assess whether a student is competent to consent to counselling. Issues that will be considered are:

- the age of the child or young person
- whether he/she understands the counselling
- whether they are refusing to inform/allow their parents to be informed
- whether his/her best interests require that counselling is provided without parental consent
- what support they have apart from counselling
- whether there is significant risk posed to or by the child
- whether the child understands:
 - the nature of the issue or problem
 - their own needs and those of others
 - the risks and benefits of counselling
- whether the child has:
 - a sense of their own identity
 - a sense of time – past, present and future

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