

## 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 they believe 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.

The counsellor will make every effort to make parents/carers aware of the service and to enlist their support, and students are always encouraged to tell their parents/carers that they have seen the counsellor. However, as long as the young person 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 take place during term time only. There are different frequencies offered to students who wish to take up regular sessions. A large proportion of students attend counselling on a weekly basis, as they feel this would be most helpful for them. Some students prefer to come less frequently and may choose to come fortnightly or even for a half-termly “check-up”. If referrals to counselling are greater than the service’s capacity, the counsellor will apply a waiting list system.

Ongoing appointments are booked at the end of each session, trying to avoid important or favourite lessons and cooperating with any expressed child, teacher or parental preference. Rotating times help to ensure that the same lesson is not repeatedly missed, and students are never taken from double PE classes. With their permission, students can be reminded of their session by their tutor during Morning Registration or fetched from class if they forget their appointment. At the start of a counselling session the counsellor will mark the electronic register with a ‘7’, which means ‘present elsewhere’ with a

member of school staff. Sixth form students can arrange a regular appointment at a time when they do not have classes.

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 Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS). Parents/Carers 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, Ms 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 child 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 them.

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 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.

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. Some of these duties include visiting during PSHCE morning Tutor Times, facilitating a Reflective Practitioner Group for school staff, and organising outside speakers to give presentations to either staff or parents/carers on any issues to do with mental health or adolescence.

The counsellor is a Registered member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), and works to their Ethical Framework for Good Practice. For more information about the BACP, please visit their website at [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk). 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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