

REMOTE COUNSELLING POLICY FOREST HILL SCHOOL: INFORMATION FOR STUDENTS, PARENTS, CARERS & STAFF

The aims of this document are to help all members of the Forest Hill School community to understand the role and purpose of the Remote Counselling Service. The Counselling Policy already in place continues to be the main document that explains how the counselling service works within the school community; this document is updated to specifically address how the remote service is organised and managed and how students can access the service if needed during the COVID – 19 school closure.

WHY COUNSELLING IS IMPORTANT & HOW IT CAN HELP:

Counselling is a therapeutic approach that provides people with the opportunity to be listened to and supported with many aspects of their well-being and mental health. The face-to-face service that is offered at FHS has been a helpful service for many students over the years. It was therefore decided that the counselling service be able to continue offering students therapeutic and emotional support during this uncertain and scary time. Students and families might experience increased feelings of stress or anxiety, and worries about how they will manage during a possibly prolonged break from the familiarity and routine of school and 'normal' everyday life.

The remote service will continue to offer a safe, confidential space where students can talk about things in their life which may be painful, difficult and causing them to feel unhappy or low. The counsellor will not judge students or tell students what to do, but help students find what is needed to move forward and make positive changes in their life.

REFERRAL PROCESS:

The remote service is open to students from both the Secondary and SFH6. If a member of staff thinks a student would benefit from the remote counselling service then it would be helpful to discuss it with the student first to see what they think. Where students are referred by a member of staff via the Head of Year, parents will be consulted (Years 7 and 8) or informed (Years 9 – 11).

Students in Years 9- 13 are welcome to make contact with the counsellor themselves if they wish to self-refer. Parents and carers can also contact the counsellor directly.

The next step is to either contact the counsellor yourself (if referring a student) or support the student to get in touch with the counsellor themselves (this being suitable for Years 9 – 13). This can be done by email to C.Rhodes@foresthillschool.co.uk. This is not an anonymous service, so if a student is making contact please email using your school address, NOT an external or other personal account.

IMPORTANT LOGISTICS AND COUNSELLING TIMETABLE:

Counselling sessions will take place during the school Term Times only; during the already scheduled Easter/Spring Break, May Half Term and Summer Holiday the counsellor will not be available.

The Remote Service is an interim measure and will only take place during the period of the school closure. Once the school reopens, the Remote Service will stop and students will be offered to continue meeting in person in the designated counselling room at school. Any students can decide to end the counselling at this point if they do not wish to continue.

Sessions are offered Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays during the hours of 9am – 3pm (the last session taking place at 2pm). This schedule will be reviewed and can be extended depending on popularity of the service.

Counselling sessions will start at the same times during the days available and last for a maximum of 60 minutes. Students who decide to meet regularly will be seen at the same time on the same day.

Counselling sessions are offered via Microsoft Teams; this is the communication platform used by the school, which has the capacity for both voice and video calls. The platform is safe and private to use; content of the sessions are not recorded nor stored in any database by Microsoft. The only information known is that a voice/video took place, and the date, time and duration of this call.

After a student is referred, I will email them with the details of how they can log in to Microsoft Teams. It is important they practice this once before their session to make sure their log in works.

It is important that the student can have access to a safe space from which to talk that is private and where they will not be interrupted for the duration of the session. Parents/carers can support the student in this endeavour wherever possible in order to retain the confidentiality and efficacy of the counselling relationship and process.

Counselling is based on the premise of mutual respect, for the student from the counsellor, but also for the counsellor from the student. It is important to make explicit that as the sessions will be taking place online and many students might prefer to use their mobile phone or personal computer for this, the student must agree to not take any screen shots or record all or any part of the counselling session.

CONFIDENTIALITY / PRIVACY & DATA PROTECTION:

Issues discussed in the counselling sessions will be confidential; this means that anything talked about in the sessions remains between the student and the counsellor.

However, there are some occasions when it is not possible to keep confidentiality, and each student needs to understand and agree to this at the start. These occasions include:

- If the counsellor believes you are in danger or at risk of serious harm from yourself or someone else
- If the counsellor believes that someone else is at risk of serious harm
- If certain information is requested by a court of law (this is very rare)

Safeguarding and Child Protection issues are referred in the first instance, to Iain Haresign, Deputy Head Teacher. If Mr Haresign is not available, Ms Jones (Inclusion Manager) will be the next point of contact. If they are not available then another suitable senior member of staff will be contacted. Mr Haresign will be regularly informed of the referrals that are made and of the names of the students who are seen. This is to safeguard students and ensure they are being supported effectively. No more information, other than a student's name will be passed on by the counsellor unless there is a safeguarding issue.

To help the counsellor in their work and to main good professional practice, written records are kept of the sessions. These are also confidential and kept securely by the counsellor, separate from other information held by school on the student and not seen by anyone else. These consist of individual record sheets for each client, recording essential information, contacts made, action taken and an outline of issues discussed. During the school closure, these records will be kept electronically. Each student will have a file that is password protected and identifiable by a code that is known only to the counsellor. Confidentiality and data protection are covered in the first session and agreed to by every student.
