



# Counselling policy

<b>Last updated by counsellor</b>	September 2023
<b>Last reviewed by advisory board</b>	September 2023
<b>Next review due</b>	August 2024

## **Counselling at St. John's Prep. and Senior School**

At St. John's Prep. and Senior School, our aim is to support and encourage the needs of the pupil within their academic learning to reach and develop their potential. We are mindful that some pupils from time to time may need additional support and would benefit from having the opportunity to work through some of their difficulties.

The counsellor is employed by the school on a consultancy basis and offers a counselling service for all pupils at St. John's.

The counsellor is qualified and experienced, accredited through the professional body, British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) along with being registered through the Professional Standards Authority.

The counsellor is available throughout term time to help support the psychological and emotional well-being of all pupils at St John's.

This school's counselling service is designed to complement the excellent pastoral system which is acknowledged as one of the strengths of the school.

### **What is counselling and how may it help?**

The counselling offered adheres to the Good Practice for Counselling in Schools (4<sup>th</sup> edition), along with ethical framework of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), and of course the policies of St. John's Prep. and Senior School.

According to BACP, "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 and/or enhance their wellbeing".

Many young people face many challenges whilst growing up and may find at times that they need someone to talk to external to either home or school. Counselling is a process which offers support and guidance when things feel particularly difficult. The counsellor will provide a safe and confidential space for a young person to explore thoughts and feelings which perhaps are overwhelming and upsetting, in a drive to enable positive change.

BACP states that counselling can:

- help to have a better understanding of our relationships and find ways to improve them.
- increase our level of self- awareness and confidence
- help to explore and understand our feelings as well as managing them better.

- enable recognition of unhelpful thought patterns and the adoption of positive new ones.
- recognise the past and current behaviours which we do not want to take into the future.
- help to improve communication skills.
- offer a place to reflect upon oneself and our relationship with the world.

Counselling offers pupils a regular space and time to talk and think of their worries and difficulties with the support of a professional counsellor. It helps them explore their feelings and look at how they might want things to be different this is achieved by talking therapy and the use a range of activities and resources. The counsellor's support is available to pupils in a range of issues including developmental issues, resolving family or friendship concerns, improving relationships, making positive choices, coping with change, and addressing negative thinking or behaviours.

It should be noted that counselling is on a voluntary basis. Children and young people are less likely to initiate therapy/counselling if they are "forced" to attend by teachers, carers, or other adults, but suggest encouragement. We support BACP's recommendation that "counselling involves a deliberately undertaken contract with agreed boundaries and commitment to privacy and confidentiality" (BACP Code of Ethics and Practice 2018).

Children and young people with challenging behaviour may be referred for counselling to help them change their behaviour rather than to provide emotional support or to alleviate any underlying distress.

St John's Prep and Senior School's counselling service is provided by a trained and accredited counsellor who is checked by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) and works in accordance with the BACP Code of Ethics and Practice (2018).

### **How counselling works in the context of St. John's pastoral provision**

All pupils in school can access a range of pastoral support. Staff are committed to providing support by listening well and most have been trained in mental health first aid. Some have been trained in aspects of counselling to support pupils. Where staff, parents, or the pupil themselves identify that there is a need for additional support, our counselling service will be one of the options available.

Examples of pastoral support and counselling for pupils at St. John's School include:

- pastoral support systems in school: form tutors, teachers, other members of staff
- school-based counsellor
- signposting to other, external specialist support.

Issues of concern which may be raised with the counsellor could include:

- family problems and relationships
- school related issues- homework, pressures of exams
- relationship with peers in and outside school
- behavioural problem
- life transition
- anxiety
- depression
- lack of confidence
- physical health
- identity issues
- sexual behaviour/orientation
- bereavement/loss
- self-harm
- eating disorders
- substance abuse
- future education/careers
- social network abuse
- sleep issues.

## **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality will generally be essential to the formal counselling process, but the counsellor will be at liberty to make disclosures on a “need-to-know” basis to appropriate individuals and agencies if issues of child protection or safeguarding arise.

### **Why confidentiality is important:**

- To enable to young person to develop a trusting relationship with the counsellor.
- To allow the young person to be honest and share feelings without the fear of blame or reprisal.
- To allow the young person to speak freely about issues concerning them.
- To encourage others to come forward for counselling.
- To reflect obligations under the Human Right Act 1998, Article 8 of the right to privacy.

Mutual trust and goodwill and respect between counsellor, school, staff, and parents will help ensure that the confidentiality is maintained. The staff and the counsellor will encourage a young person to discuss their counselling with their parents in appropriate cases.

A pupil is free to talk to anyone about their counselling session if they wish but will not be directly questioned by staff. Parents are encouraged to be sensitive to their child's wishes when seeking to discuss counselling.

The counsellor will not pass on detailed accounts of sessions but may with the pupil's permission communicate periodically with the school pastoral staff about the support provided. A pupil may wish a trusted member of staff to know that they are receiving counselling to feel supported between the sessions.

The school counsellor will keep a record of issues raised by children and young people in general categories and share this with the school to help inform the school's development of its policies and procedures for supporting its pupils.

Sometimes the counsellor will identify that it is in the best interest of the child or young person to liaise with or refer the young person to another agency for help. This will be with the young persons express permission and/or parental consent unless there are child protection or safeguarding concerns, in which the need to safeguard the child or young person's welfare and safety will take precedence (please refer to the school's safeguarding policy).

### **What limits are there to confidentiality?**

All young people are entitled to confidentiality as outlined by the BACP (British Association of Counsellor and Psychotherapists) Code of Ethics. This means that the information they bring to the session will be held in confidence between themselves and the counsellor.

Whilst it is recognised that "Any attempt to remove the principles of confidentiality in counselling will rapidly undermine the overall ethos of the school as a caring educational community", (Roger Casemore, Confidentiality and School Counselling, BACP 1995), a child or young person's wishes about confidentiality may be overridden by the paramount duty to protect their safety and welfare.

### **Breaching confidentiality**

The counsellor will, at the outset of working with a pupil, discuss a therapeutic contract and make it clear to them that they may need to breach confidentiality (i.e., tell someone and seek support). They will explain it may happen when the young person or any other person (adult or child) is at risk of significant harm.

The counsellor will discuss this again with the young person if the need arises, and if the child is "Gillick competent" seek to gain their consent to disclosing concerns. The counsellor may make disclosures without the child or young person's consent in the appropriate circumstances. The counsellor will follow the school's Safeguarding policy in the first instance and raise any concerns with the school's Designated Safeguarding

Lead (DSL). Where possible, the counsellor will keep the child or young person informed and involved them in the process.

In the case of a young person threatening suicide or serious self-harm, there is a general acceptance of the need for intervention even when this involves breaking confidentiality.

The counsellor is not required to pass on information about a young person breaking a school rule, unless it could be deemed that by withholding information the counsellor was aiding and abetting a crime (e.g., a young person dealing drugs in school, or placing themselves or another child/young person at risk of significant harm). At this point information may need to be shared with the designated safeguarding team, who would decide whether a referral would need to be made to an outside agency.

Counsellors have both a legal (GDPR) and ethical (confidentiality) duty to store counselling notes safely. Confidential records of the counselling are kept securely by the counsellor, separate from other information held by school.

### **Counselling Sessions**

Counselling is on a voluntary basis during school time, and the time limit is open ended, which means the counselling is provided for as long as the counsellor considers that the pupil is continuing to benefit from the sessions. The sessions are a mixture of face to face and online, and times will vary from week to week, to avoid missing the same lesson on that day. The counsellor is flexible to ensure the child/young person can access counselling, and if required, the counselling can be held after school hours online.

All sessions are to be held in a quiet, safe comfortable room, in which the individual can explore their difficulties and worries.

Please see the referral form for counselling support at the end of this policy.

### **What supervision does our school counsellor need?**

According to BACP, a professional counsellor is expected to attend a regular external consultative supervision of 1.5 hours a month. Counselling without supervision is unethical and will compromise the quality of the work. The school counsellor attends all supervision monthly and attends regular continued professional developmental training to keep up to date with counselling theory and practice in accordance with BACP guidelines.

## **How does our counsellor evaluate and report back on the service?**

The school counsellor will gather data and compile an annual report for the school, giving accurate recorded statistics on:

- the number, age, gender, and ethnicity of young people referred.
- the length and outcomes of counselling
- the sort of issues raised during counselling sessions.

All such feedback will be general, and no individual pupil will be identifiable.

## **How are parents involved?**

Gillick competency and Fraser guidelines help people who work with children to balance the need to listen to children's wishes with the responsibility to keep them safe. According to Lord Scarman in the case *Gillick v West Norfolk AHAH* (1985), a child under 16 may consent for treatment on their behalf if, and when they achieve sufficient maturity to understand fully what is proposed and the potential consequences. Although it has not been tested by the Court, it is generally understood that children of primary school age are unlikely to be "Gillick competent" and consequently would not be able to give consent which is valid in law.

All parents whose children attend the Prep. School would be required to give consent for their child to attend counselling on a regular basis. At times some parents also wish to disclose behavioural issues that also affect the home, and on occasions some counselling sessions may be with the parent attending.

Many, but not all, of our Senior School pupils may be deemed "competent" under the Gillick ruling and give consent. However, young people should be offered one or two initial exploratory sessions with the counsellor to outline what is involved, to allow the counsellor and the link professional in the school to assess their competence before they commit themselves, and to encourage the young person to agree to their parents being approached for them to have ongoing counselling.

At St. John's School, where a parent withholds consent of the young person may be very distressed and unwilling for the school to approach the parents, counselling can go ahead if the counsellor assesses the young person as Gillick competent to consent in their own right.

If a young person is unwilling to involve their parents and is assessed competent, the young person may give their own written consent for counselling. No specific age is stated in legal guidance – it does depend on their capacity to understand the issues involved and give an informed consent: "As a general principle, it is legal and acceptable, for a young person to ask for confidential counselling without parental

consent providing they are of sufficient understanding and intelligence” (Gillick v West Norfolk AHAH, House of Lords, 1985).

### **Review**

This policy will be reviewed on an annual basis, or earlier if the need arises.



# Referral for Counselling

St Johns School  
Senior and Preparatory School

Name			
Age and DOB			
Pupil's school email address			
Ethnicity	Class No		Name of form teacher
Referred by	Date of referral		
<p><b>Preparatory School</b> – Permission needs to be given by <b>parents/carer</b> for counselling to go ahead. Please indicate who has given the permission. <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>_____ Date _____</p> <p>If no, please obtain before referring.</p> <p>However, if the child is distressed, a one-off session can be provided until permission is granted.</p> <p><b>Senior School</b> – If child is Gillick competent the parent's authorisation is <b>not</b> required. The young person is required to put in writing consent for counselling and handed in with the referral form.</p> <p>Parental/pupil signature confirming consent.</p> <p>_____ Date _____</p>			

<p><u>Reason for referral</u> (Please continue separate page if required).</p>
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