



Counselling policy

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Counselling at St. John's Preparatory and Senior School

- At St. John's, we aim 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.
- A qualified, experienced 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 accredited through the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and registered with the Professional Standards Authority.
- The counsellor is available throughout term time to help support pupils' psychological and emotional wellbeing.
- This school's counselling service is designed to complement the excellent pastoral system, acknowledged to be a key strength of the school which has achieved the National Nurturing School Award.

What is counselling and how may it help?

- The counselling offered adheres to the Good Practice for Counselling in Schools (4th edition); the BACP's ethical framework; and all relevant school policies.
- 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 on 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 engaging with counselling is on a voluntary basis. Children and young people are less likely to initiate therapy/counselling if they are 'forced' rather than encouraged to attend by teachers, parents, carers, or other adults. 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).
- 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.
- The counsellor works in accordance with the latest 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 other pastoral support for pupils at St. John's School include pastoral support systems in school: form tutors, teachers, other members of staff; and 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 and gender identity issues
- sexual behaviour/orientation
- bereavement/loss
- self-harm
- eating disorders
- substance abuse
- future education/careers
- social network abuse
- sleep issues.

Special Educational Needs and or/Disabilities (SEND)

- Pupils with SEND, including those with Autism, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity-Disorder (ADHD), and/or other related needs, may be referred for counselling support by the SENDCo as part of their holistic development and support plan. The purpose of counselling is to assist pupils in understanding and expressing their emotions, managing feelings such as anxiety, anger, or frustration, developing positive peer relationships, addressing experiences of bullying, and supporting them through key educational and personal transitions to help reach their full potential.
- This support is available on an ongoing basis throughout the pupil's time at St. John's. Engagement in counselling is entirely voluntary, and pupils have the autonomy to withdraw or return from sessions at any point, should they wish to do so.

Benefits

According to BACP, having a counsellor in the school setting offers a range of valuable benefits and helps alleviate the emotional and psychological distress experienced by children and young people who are navigating various life challenges.

Benefits include:

1. providing a safe, confidential environment where pupils can openly discuss their difficulties without fear of judgment.
2. equipping children and young people with practical coping strategies and supporting their development of resilience.
3. fostering positive self-esteem, boosting confidence, enhancing social skills, and promoting overall mental wellbeing.
4. enhancing pupils' engagement and participation in their learning.
5. contributing to reducing the stigma surrounding mental health issues.

6. offering valuable insights and guidance to school staff on how best to support the emotional needs of pupils.
7. strengthening connections between schools, families, and specialist services, ensuring a more coordinated approach to support.

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

Confidentiality guidance

- Mutual trust, goodwill and respect between counsellor, school, staff, and parents will help ensure that 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’s 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 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 person’s 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 also refer to the school's safeguarding policy).

What limits are there to confidentiality?

- All pupils 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 DSL, who would decide whether a referral would need to be made to an outside agency.
- Counsellors have both a legal data protection and ethical duty to store counselling notes securely and confidentiality. Confidential records of 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 receive?

- 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 may compromise the quality of the work. The school counsellor attends the required supervision monthly and additionally 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 gathers data and compiles an annual report for the school, providing accurate information on the number, age, gender, and ethnicity of young people referred; the length and outcomes of counselling sessions; and the types of themes and issues raised during counselling sessions. All such feedback is always general, and no individual pupil is identifiable.

How are parents and carers 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 AHA* (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 Preparatory School are therefore required to give consent for their child to attend counselling on a regular basis.
- Parents sometimes disclose concerns such as behavioural issues at home, and so on some occasions, counselling sessions may be offered with both the pupils and parent/s 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 staff member 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.
- Where a parent withholds consent or if the young person may be unwilling for the school to approach their parents, counselling may go ahead if the counsellor assesses the young person as Gillick competent to consent in their own right. A young person is assessed competent; the young person may give their own written consent for counselling. No specific age is stated in legal guidance – it depends 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 AHA, House of Lords, 1985).

