



Counselling policy

Last updated by counsellor

September 2026

Last reviewed by advisory board

September 2026

Next review due

September 2027

Introduction

At St. John's, we aim to support and encourage the needs of pupils within their academic learning, enabling them to develop and reach their potential. We recognise that some pupils may, from time to time, require additional emotional or psychological support and may benefit from having the opportunity to work through difficulties with a professional counsellor.

A qualified and experienced counsellor is employed by the school on a consultancy basis and offers a counselling service to 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 support pupils' psychological and emotional wellbeing.

The school counselling service is designed to complement the school's established pastoral provision, which is recognised as a key strength of the school and forms part of its whole-school approach to wellbeing. St. John's has achieved the National Nurturing School Award.

What is counselling and how may it help?

The counselling service is informed by:

- Good Practice in Action guidance for counselling in schools;
- the BACP Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions;
- School-based counselling – the essential guide for school leaders, mental health leads and commissioners (2023); and
- all relevant school policies and statutory safeguarding guidance.

Counselling and psychotherapy are umbrella terms covering a range of talking therapies delivered by trained practitioners. Counselling provides children and young people with an opportunity to explore difficulties, understand themselves and their experiences, develop coping strategies and enhance their emotional wellbeing.

Many young people experience challenges while growing up and may, at times, benefit from talking to someone who is separate from their family and day-to-day school relationships. Counselling provides a safe, supportive and confidential therapeutic space in which a pupil can explore thoughts, feelings and experiences that may be difficult, overwhelming or upsetting.

Counselling can help pupils to:

- develop a better understanding of relationships and identify ways of improving them;
- increase self-awareness, self-esteem and confidence;
- explore, understand and manage emotions;
- recognise unhelpful patterns of thinking and develop healthier ways of thinking;
- recognise past and current behaviour they may wish to change;
- improve communication skills;
- develop resilience and positive coping strategies; and
- reflect upon themselves, their experiences and their relationship with the wider world.

Counselling offers pupils regular time and space to talk and think about worries or difficulties with the support of a professional counsellor. Depending upon the pupil's individual needs, this may involve talking therapy and the use of a range of appropriate therapeutic activities and resources.

The counsellor's support is available for a wide range of issues, including developmental difficulties, family or friendship concerns, relationships, making positive choices, coping with change, emotional distress and negative thinking or behaviours.

Engagement with counselling is voluntary. Children and young people are less likely to engage effectively in counselling where they feel forced to attend. Teachers, parents/carers and other adults may therefore encourage and support a pupil to access counselling, but the therapeutic process requires the pupil's participation and engagement.

Children and young people experiencing challenging behaviour may be referred for counselling to provide emotional support, explore and address any underlying distress or difficulties, support them with any issues or concerns they may be experiencing, and help them develop positive coping strategies and make appropriate changes to their behaviour.

The counsellor works in accordance with the current BACP Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions (2018) and will work in accordance with the updated BACP Ethical Framework when it comes into effect in November 2026.

How counselling works within St. John's pastoral provision

All pupils can access a range of pastoral support within the school. Staff are committed to supporting pupils through listening, pastoral care and appropriate early intervention. Where staff, parents/carers or pupils themselves identify a need for additional emotional or psychological support, counselling is one of the options available.

Other pastoral support may include form tutors, teachers, pastoral staff, SEND provision, mentoring and signposting or referral to appropriate external specialist services.

Issues that may be explored within counselling include:

- family problems and relationships;
- school-related difficulties, including homework and examination pressures;
- relationships with peers in and outside school;
- behavioural difficulties;
- life transitions and change;
- anxiety;
- depression and low mood;
- lack of confidence or low self-esteem;
- physical health and its emotional impact;
- identity and gender identity;
- sexuality and relationships;
- bereavement and loss;

- self-harm;
- eating difficulties or disorders;
- substance misuse;
- future education and careers;
- online/social media-related difficulties or abuse; and
- sleep difficulties.

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 or through other appropriate referral routes as part of their holistic development and support.

Counselling may assist pupils in understanding and expressing emotions, managing anxiety, anger or frustration, developing positive peer relationships, addressing experiences of bullying and supporting them through educational and personal transitions.

Counselling support may be available on an ongoing basis throughout the pupil's time at St. John's where appropriate. Engagement remains voluntary and pupils may choose to withdraw from counselling or request further counselling at a later stage.

Benefits of counselling

School-based counselling can provide a range of benefits to children and young people experiencing emotional and psychological difficulties or navigating challenging life experiences.

1. Providing a safe and confidential environment in which pupils can discuss difficulties without fear of judgement.
2. Develop a better understanding of their thoughts, feelings and behaviour.
3. Learn healthy ways/strategies to manage anxiety, stress, anger and overwhelming emotions.
4. Develop effective coping strategies and resilience that can be used both in and outside school.
5. Supporting positive self-esteem, confidence, more positive sense of self-worth, social skills and emotional wellbeing.
6. Develop emotional regulation skills and recognise triggers or early signs of distress
7. Supporting pupils' engagement and participation in education.
8. Helping to reduce stigma surrounding mental health and emotional difficulties.
9. Process difficult or traumatic experiences in a safe and age-appropriate way.
10. Cope with bereavement, loss, family changes, separation or other significant life events.
11. Explore difficulties relating to friendships, relationships, bullying or social pressures
12. Develop healthier communication and relationship skills.
13. Improve problem-solving, decision-making and resilience.

14. Explore issues relating to identity, belonging and growing up.
15. Receive support with school-related anxiety, academic pressure and examinations.
16. Understand how emotional wellbeing may affect concentration, attendance, behaviour and learning.
17. Identify and build upon their individual strengths and personal resources.
18. Work towards positive and achievable goals that are meaningful to them.
19. Improve their overall emotional wellbeing and ability to cope with future challenges.
20. Providing appropriate professional insight and guidance to staff about supporting pupils' emotional needs, without compromising therapeutic confidentiality, along with strengthening appropriate links between the school, families and specialist services to provide coordinated support.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is an essential part of the counselling process. However, confidentiality is not absolute.

Where concerns relating to a child or young person's safety, welfare, child protection or safeguarding arise, the counsellor will share relevant information with the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), or appropriate Deputy DSL, on a need-to-know basis.

Where necessary, information may also be shared with appropriate individuals, professionals or external agencies in accordance with the school's safeguarding procedures and relevant statutory guidance.

Why confidentiality is important

- enable pupils to develop a trusting therapeutic relationship with the counsellor;
- allow pupils to be open and honest about their thoughts and feelings;
- allow pupils to speak freely about matters that concern them;
- encourage pupils to access counselling when they require support; and
- protect the pupil's right to privacy, (article 8 of the Human Rights Act, 1998) subject to safeguarding and other lawful limitations.

Confidentiality guidance

- Mutual trust, goodwill and respect between the counsellor, school, staff, pupils and parents/carers help support appropriate confidentiality.
- Where appropriate, pupils may be encouraged to discuss aspects of their counselling or emotional wellbeing with their parents/carers.
- A pupil is free to talk to others about their own counselling sessions if they wish. However, school staff will not routinely question pupils about the content of their

counselling sessions. Parents/carers are also encouraged to respect their child's privacy and therapeutic relationship.

- The counsellor will not provide detailed accounts of counselling sessions to school staff or parents/carers. With the pupil's appropriate consent, the counsellor may communicate relevant information to pastoral staff where this would support the pupil. A pupil may, for example, wish a trusted member of staff to know that they are receiving counselling so that appropriate support can be provided between sessions.
- The counsellor may record general categories of issues or themes raised through the counselling service and provide anonymised information to the school to assist with the development and evaluation of pastoral, wellbeing and mental health provision. Individual pupils will not be identifiable from such reporting.
- There may be occasions when the counsellor identifies that it is in the best interests of the child or young person to liaise with or refer them to another professional or agency. Appropriate consent will be sought wherever required unless there are safeguarding or child protection concerns, in which case the need to protect the child or young person may take precedence.

Limits to confidentiality

All pupils are entitled to an appropriate level of confidentiality within the therapeutic relationship in accordance with professional and ethical requirements.

However, a pupil's wishes regarding confidentiality may be overridden where there is a safeguarding concern or where the counsellor has a professional or legal responsibility to share information to protect the pupil or another person from harm.

Breaching confidentiality

At the outset of counselling, the counsellor will discuss the therapeutic agreement with the pupil and explain confidentiality and its limitations in an age-appropriate way.

The pupil will be made aware that there may be circumstances where the counsellor needs to share information with another person to obtain appropriate help or protect them or another person from harm.

Where a safeguarding concern arises, the counsellor will discuss the need to share information with the child or young person where it is appropriate and safe to do so.

For secondary school pupils who are assessed as being Gillick competent, the counsellor will seek their consent to share relevant information wherever possible. However, there may be circumstances where information must be disclosed regardless without the child or young person's consent to safeguard them or another person.

The counsellor will follow the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and, in the first instance, report safeguarding concerns to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), or appropriate Deputy DSL.

Wherever possible and appropriate, the counsellor will keep the child or young person informed about what information is being shared, with whom and why, and involve them in the process.

Where a pupil expresses suicidal thoughts, serious self-harm or other significant risk to themselves or another person, appropriate safeguarding intervention will be undertaken even where this requires confidentiality to be breached.

The counsellor is not ordinarily required to report minor breaches of school rules disclosed during counselling. However, where information raises safeguarding concerns, involves serious risk or indicates that the pupil or another person may be at risk of harm, relevant information will be shared with the DSL in accordance with the school's safeguarding procedures.

Counselling records and data protection

- The counsellor will maintain appropriate records relating to counselling in accordance with professional, ethical and data protection requirements.
- Counselling records will be stored securely and separately from the pupil's general school records, with access appropriately restricted.
- Information will only be shared where there is a legitimate and appropriate reason to do so, including where the pupil has given appropriate consent or where disclosure is necessary for safeguarding, child protection or other legal purposes.
- Counselling records and personal information will be retained only for as long as required in accordance with applicable data protection requirements, professional guidance and relevant privacy and record-retention arrangements.
- Records will be securely disposed of when the applicable retention period has ended.

Counselling sessions

- Counselling is voluntary and may be provided during the school day or, where appropriate, outside normal school hours.
- Counselling may be short-term, longer-term or open-ended depending upon the individual needs of the pupil. Support will continue for as long as the counsellor considers that the pupil is appropriately engaging with and benefiting from the therapeutic work.
- Sessions may be provided face-to-face or online. Where sessions take place during the school day, appointments may be varied where practicable to reduce the likelihood of the pupil repeatedly missing the same lesson.
- All sessions will take place in an appropriate, quiet, safe and comfortable environment in which the pupil can explore their difficulties and concerns confidentially.
- Please refer to the school's counselling referral arrangements for further information about accessing the service.

Out of school hours online counselling

- Where appropriate, counselling sessions may be provided online to enable pupils to access support flexibly, including outside normal school hours.
- Online counselling will be provided with the same professional, ethical, confidentiality and safeguarding standards as face-to-face counselling.
- Pupils will be encouraged to attend online sessions from a private, safe and appropriate location where they can speak freely and without unnecessary interruption. At the beginning of an online session, the counsellor may confirm that the pupil is in a suitable location and able to engage safely and confidentially.
- If a safeguarding or welfare concern arises during an online session, the counsellor will follow the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), or appropriate Deputy DSL, as required.
- Where an online session is disrupted because of technical difficulties, reasonable attempts will be made to re-establish contact or make alternative arrangements.

Reviewing and ending counselling

- Counselling is provided according to the individual needs of the pupil and may be short-term or longer-term.
- The counsellor will periodically review the pupil's engagement, progress and ongoing therapeutic needs.
- Where counselling is coming to an end, this will, wherever possible, be planned and discussed with the pupil to provide an appropriate therapeutic ending.
- Pupils may choose to withdraw from counselling at any time and, where appropriate, may return for further support at a later stage.
- The school counselling service is not an emergency or crisis service. Where there is an immediate concern regarding a pupil's safety or welfare, the school's safeguarding procedures will be followed and appropriate support or external services contacted where necessary.

Role and professional boundaries of the school counsellor

The school counsellor provides a professional and confidential therapeutic service within the school's wider pastoral, wellbeing and safeguarding provision.

The counsellor's role is to provide pupils with a safe and supportive space in which they can explore emotional, psychological, behavioural, relationship and other difficulties that may be affecting their wellbeing.

The counsellor works therapeutically and independently within their professional role while also working collaboratively with appropriate school staff where necessary to support a pupil's wellbeing and safety.

The counsellor's role is distinct from that of teachers, pastoral staff, the SENDCo and the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

Counselling sessions are not disciplinary in nature, and the counsellor will not use information disclosed within counselling for the purpose of enforcing school rules or managing behaviour, unless the information raises a safeguarding concern or indicates that the pupil or another person may be at risk of harm.

The counsellor will maintain appropriate professional boundaries with pupils, parents/carers and members of school staff and will work within their professional competence, training and experience.

Where a pupil's needs fall outside the counsellor's professional competence or the scope of the school counselling service, consideration will be given to referral or signposting to an appropriate external professional or specialist service.

The counsellor will not provide information about the detailed content of individual counselling sessions to parents/carers or school staff without the pupil's appropriate consent, except where disclosure is required for safeguarding, child protection or other legal or professional reasons.

The counsellor will maintain appropriate communication with relevant pastoral and safeguarding staff where necessary, while ensuring that only information that is relevant and proportionate is shared.

The counsellor receives regular independent clinical supervision and undertakes continuing professional development (CPD) to maintain and develop their professional knowledge, competence and therapeutic practice.

Referral to and liaison with external services

The school counselling service forms part of the school's wider pastoral and wellbeing provision.

There may be occasions when a pupil's needs are beyond the scope of school-based counselling or where additional or specialist assessment, intervention or support would be beneficial.

Where appropriate, the counsellor may discuss with the pupil and, where applicable, DSL, SENCO, their parent(s)/carer(s), the possibility of accessing additional support or specialist services. This may include, for example, the pupil's GP, Children and Young People's Mental Health Services (CYPMHS/CAMHS), social care, early help services or other appropriate health, wellbeing or specialist services.

Where consent is required, this will be sought in accordance with the pupil's age, understanding and Gillick competence. However, where there are safeguarding or child protection concerns, the need to protect the child or young person will take priority and information may be shared without consent where this is necessary and appropriate.

The counsellor will work collaboratively with the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), pastoral staff, SENDCo and other relevant professionals where appropriate, while maintaining the confidentiality and professional boundaries of the therapeutic relationship.

Counselling is not intended to replace specialist mental health assessment, medical treatment or statutory services where these are required.

Where a pupil requires a level or type of intervention beyond the scope of the school counselling service, appropriate referral or signposting will be considered.

What supervision does the school counsellor receive?

Professional clinical supervision is an essential element of ethical counselling practice. The school counsellor attends regular independent clinical supervision in accordance with BACP requirements and professional good practice.

Clinical supervision provides an appropriate confidential professional environment in which therapeutic work, ethical issues, professional practice and the counsellor's ongoing development can be considered.

The counsellor also undertakes regular continuing professional development (CPD) to maintain and develop their knowledge, skills and competence and to remain informed about developments in counselling and psychotherapy practice.

How does the counsellor evaluate and report on the service?

The school counsellor gathers appropriate anonymised data and prepares an annual report for the school to assist in evaluating the counselling and wellbeing provision.

This may include information relating to:

- the number of pupils accessing counselling;
- age groups and other appropriate demographic information;
- number and duration of counselling sessions;
- presenting themes and issues;
- referrals and safeguarding themes where appropriate;
- outcomes and evaluation of the service; and
- emerging themes that may help inform the school's wider pastoral and wellbeing provision.

All reporting will be general and anonymised. Individual pupils will not be identifiable within routine service evaluation reports.

How are parents and carers involved?

The school recognises the important role that parents and carers play in supporting the emotional wellbeing of children and young people.

Wherever appropriate, pupils will be encouraged to involve their parents/carers in their counselling and emotional support. However, this will be balanced with the pupil's right to confidentiality, their individual circumstances, age, level of understanding and, where applicable, their Gillick competence.

Gillick competence and consent

Gillick competence provides a framework for assessing whether a child or young person under the age of 16 has sufficient maturity, intelligence and understanding to make decisions regarding their own treatment or support.

There is no specific age at which a child automatically becomes Gillick competent. Competence is assessed individually according to the child or young person's ability to understand the nature, purpose and possible consequences of the counselling being offered.

Primary school pupils will normally require parental/carer consent before engaging in regular counselling. Parents/carers of pupils attending the Preparatory School will therefore be asked to provide consent for their child to access ongoing counselling. Many secondary school pupils may have sufficient maturity and understanding to be assessed as Gillick competent and may therefore be able to consent to counselling in their own right.

Where appropriate, the counsellor may offer an initial exploratory session to explain counselling, confidentiality and its limitations and to assess the pupil's understanding and ability to provide informed consent.

Where a secondary school pupil is assessed as Gillick competent, counselling may proceed without parental consent where appropriate.

Nevertheless, the counsellor will generally encourage the pupil to involve their parent/carer where this would be safe, appropriate and beneficial to their wellbeing. Where a pupil is not assessed as Gillick competent, appropriate parental/carer consent will be obtained before ongoing counselling is provided.

Working with parents and carers

Parents/carers may raise concerns regarding their child's emotional wellbeing, behaviour at home, family relationships or other difficulties. Where appropriate and considered beneficial, joint sessions may be offered involving the pupil and their parent(s)/carer(s).

These sessions may provide support to both parties, facilitate communication, help address difficulties within the family relationship and, where appropriate, include mediation and/or the development of an agreed family contract.

Any joint or family-based work will be discussed and agreed with the pupil, considering their age, understanding and Gillick competence where applicable. The purpose and boundaries of joint sessions will be made clear to everyone involved. Information disclosed by a pupil during their individual counselling sessions will not automatically be shared with their parents/carers.

The confidentiality of the therapeutic relationship will be respected unless the pupil gives appropriate consent for information to be shared or where disclosure is necessary because of safeguarding, child protection or other legal obligations. Where safeguarding concerns arise, the safety and welfare of the child or young person will take priority.

The counsellor will follow the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy and liaise with the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), or appropriate Deputy DSL, as required.

Counselling referral form

For use at both St. John's Senior and Preparatory Schools

Pupils' full name	
Age and DOB	
Pupil's school email address	
Ethnicity	Class Name of form teacher
Referred by	Date of referral
Preparatory School – Permission needs to be given by parents/carers for counselling to go ahead. Please indicate who has given the permission.	
_____ Date _____ If no, please obtain before referring.	
However, if the child is distressed, a one-off session may be provided until permission is granted.	
Senior School – If young person is Gillick competent the parent’s authorisation is not required. The young person is required to put in writing consent for counselling and hand in with the referral form.	
Parental/pupil signature confirming consent. _____ Date _____	
<u>Reason/s for referral</u>	
(Please continue on a separate page if required).	