



Counselling Policy

1. Introduction

Counselling is an intervention that children or young people can voluntarily enter into if they want to explore, understand and overcome issues in their lives which may be causing them difficulty, distress and/or confusion. A counselling relationship has identified boundaries and an explicit contract between the young person, counsellor and where appropriate, parent or carer.

Good mental and emotional wellbeing is an integral part of children and young people's holistic development. When this development is inhibited counselling can be an effective and important resource. The aims of counselling are to assist the child or young person to achieve a greater understanding of themselves and their relationships to their world, to create a greater awareness and utilisation of their personal resources to build their resilience and to support their ability to address problems and pursue meaningful goals.

In-school counselling is always at the request of the client and no one can be "sent" for counselling. Counselling in Schools: A blueprint for the future (DFE 2016) is essential reading for all Counsellors working on behalf of Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College. As well as setting out the ethical standards, it provides an explanation of many aspects of the service provided by the school, to enable counsellors to offer the most effective support.

2. The Role of a School Counsellor

As a schools we employ counsellors to help address the emotional needs that young people can have in response to experiences such as family breakdown, bereavement, loss, family and peer relationship difficulties, anxiety and bullying. Counselling can be an effective source of support for these students, enabling them to function better both in and outside school, enhancing their resilience and giving them resources to manage any future difficulties.

Counselling at Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College is part of the pastoral support programme within the school and is an onsite response for those students needing the additional expertise that counselling brings to the overall pastoral support system. The Counsellor will provide 6 one to one counselling sessions, once a week for 50 minutes per client.

2.1 Associate Counsellors

In addition to the School Counsellor, there will be at times a Student Counsellor(s) on placement at the school, who are attending a recognised university or college course in Counselling. They will also be in a position to offer 6 one to one counselling sessions, once a week for 50 mins. They will work to a recognised ethical framework such as that of the BACP, and they will be mentored and regularly supervised by the School Counsellor. Associate counsellors wishing to use clients for written case studies for university assessments, need to discuss the matter with the counsellor/Deputy Headteacher before any consent can be given.

2.2 Certificates

Counsellors are responsible for providing Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College with copies of renewed certificates of their DBS checks, professional indemnity insurance and membership of their governing body. Copies should be given to the Administrator annually.

2.3 Other Professionals

In order to reduce any potential conflicts of therapeutic effort, the School Counsellor and Associate Counsellors will not provide counselling to young people who are currently in receipt of other therapeutic support from another agency, i.e. CAMHs.

2.4 Supervision

All counsellors need to engage in regular clinical supervision to maintain and monitor standards and to comply with their ethical code. School counsellors should undertake counselling supervision with a supervisor who has experience and understanding of children and young people and of the school setting. Associates are responsible for making their own arrangements for supervision, in accordance with their governing body's minimum requirements.

2.5 Private Work

Where there is a need or wish on the young person's part to move on to private counselling, Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College expects the counsellor to provide signposting to other services in order to facilitate this. Recognising the young person's right to be self-governing, however, they may make the informed decision that they wish to enter a new, longer term counselling relationship with their original counsellor. In keeping with ethical working practices, the counsellor must talk this through with the Deputy Headteacher, with his/her supervisor and the parents of the young person, if consent was given, before agreeing to any further work. When approval is given by Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College, the young person should be made aware of the change of contract and hence the clinical responsibility, and written confirmation is required in recognition of this (a form is available from the Deputy Headteacher). It is suggested that there is a gap of a few weeks between the end of school counselling and the start of private work, signifying the change in relationship.

2.6 Statement of Good Practice and Confidentiality

The counsellor must be a member of a governing professional body, and be familiar with and work to the guidelines of the ethical framework. Any breaches will be dealt with through the complaints procedures of the members' governing body. Counsellors must notify Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College if they are the subject of a complaint to their professional body. In the instance of risk to self or other, confidentiality may be broken and the named Designated Safeguarding Lead shall be contacted. This will be outlined to the young person from the outset.

3. Administration

Appointments, cancellations and all relevant paperwork will be organised by Mrs C Whittle, Learning Support Assistant. It will be held in accordance with the Data Protection Act.

Counsellors should have in place arrangements for the administrator to be notified if they are suddenly unwell/unavailable and they should always be notified when individuals are planning to be away and unavailable to take referrals.

4. Referral

Referral by staff can only come through the Deputy Headteacher or relevant Achievement Co-ordinator. Any member of staff may approach one of the people to request a referral for a student. Students may self-refer. Where this occurs, the relevant Achievement Co-ordinator will be informed. A referral form will be completed by the Deputy Headteacher or relevant Achievement Co-ordinator and by Mrs C Whittle, where a waiting list is held centrally. A consent letter will then be posted out to the parent/s or carers to sign and return before counselling can begin for anyone under the age of 14.

On receipt of the consent letter, the school counsellor will make the first appointment with the child and assess their suitability for counselling.

Parents and carers or outside agencies who feel a child would benefit from counselling should discuss this with their child's Achievement Co-ordinator.

4.1 Consent

A consent letter is posted out to the parent/carer of the child upon receipt of the referral. Once this has been returned, an initial assessment appointment will be made between the School Counsellor and the young person.

For a young person to be eligible to receive counselling, s/he must understand the nature of counselling and be able to make a valid verbal counselling contract, including the ability to understand the principle of confidentiality and the need for this to be overridden where the young person is alleged to be at risk of harm from self or other.

Consent may be given by the child *without* the parent/carers' involvement, if the child is deemed Gillick competent.

As guidance for Gillick competency, the Counselling Service at Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College will take the following into consideration:

- 1. The young person has explicitly requested that their parent/carers have no knowledge about them receiving therapy.*
- 2. The Service has done everything it can to persuade the young person to involve their parent/carers.*
- 3. Documentation clearly states why the young person does not want their parent/carers to be informed.*
- 4. The young person understands the advice/information they have been given and have sufficient maturity to understand what is involved and what the implications are. They can comprehend and process information relating to counselling.*
- 5. The young person can communicate their decision and reasons for it.*
- 6. This is a rational decision based on their own religious belief or value system.*
- 7. The young person is making the decision for themselves and not being coerced or influenced by another person?*
- 8. The service must be confident in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the young person.*
- 9. Without the service, would the young person's physical or emotional health be likely to suffer?*

If the Service is able to answer YES to these questions, then this will enable the Service to believe the young person is competent to make their own decisions about consenting to and taking part in the counselling process.

4.2 Initial Assessment

After a referral has been made, an initial assessment will be completed by the school counsellor or other members of the Pastoral team. An agreement to have counselling is then signed by the young person. The school counsellor will then refer the young person if appropriate to an Associate Counsellor, or arrange an appointment to see the young person at a mutually agreeable time in school hours.

4.3 Session Allocation

Appointments are made on a weekly basis for a maximum of 6 sessions. Any extension to these sessions is through discussion between the Deputy Headteacher and the counsellor. Each session will last for 50 minutes. Appointments will be made to suit the timetable of the young person, so as not have a negative impact on their learning.

4.4 Confidentiality

Respecting the young person's privacy and confidentiality are fundamental requirements for keeping trust and respecting the young person's autonomy. The professional management of confidentiality concerns the protection of personally identifiable and sensitive information from unauthorised disclosure. Disclosure may be authorised by the young person's consent or the law. Any disclosures of a young person's confidences should be undertaken in ways that best protect the young person's trust and respect their autonomy.

Client consent is the ethically preferred way of resolving any dilemmas over confidentiality, but exceptional circumstances may prevent the counsellor from seeking client consent to a breach of confidence, due to the urgency and seriousness of the situation, for example, preventing the client causing serious harm to self or others. In such circumstances the counsellor has an ethical responsibility to act in ways which balance the client's right to confidentiality against the need to communicate with others. Counsellors should expect to be ethically accountable for any breach of confidentiality.

Confidential information about clients may be shared within teams:

1. where the client has consented or knowingly accepted a service on this basis;
2. the information can be adequately protected from unauthorised further disclosures;
3. the disclosure enhances the quality of service available to clients or improves service delivery.

4.5 Where counselling will take place

Counselling will take place in the Parent Interview Room or Quiet Room. A member of the support staff will mark the young person present when in attendance with the counsellor; overriding any absence marks a teacher may have made, for not being seen to attend a timetabled class. As part of the agreement between the counsellor and the young person, any missed appointments, without prior discussion, will be counted as one of the 6.

4.6 Sharing Information

The counselling service will work in a multi-disciplinary way and communicate with school staff, other agencies and specialised services, whilst maintaining an appropriate level of confidentiality. Counsellors may find it necessary to liaise with, share information or refer the young person to another agency for further help. This should only happen with the young person's permission.

4.7 Diversity and Additional Learning Needs

Sandbach High School and Sixth Form College is committed to providing services to young people that take account of cultural differences and Additional Learning Needs. This includes disabled young people and lesbian, gay, transgender and bisexual young people whose identity and experiences may not have been represented in the school setting.

5. Record Keeping

The school adopts a Data Protection policy in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998, and it is updated as necessary to reflect best practice in data management. Each young person's records are kept under an anonymous ID number and stored in a locked room. Statistical data will be collated on an annual basis and no student will be identified within the data collected.

5.1 Access to Records

The young person has a general right of access to educational records, as a 'data subject' set out by the DPA 1998, and this includes confidential counselling material. A parent/carer however does not have this right, and in accordance with Section 4(3) 6(1) of the DPA 1998, any disclosure or processing of such material 'is unwarranted in any particular case by reason of prejudice to the rights and freedoms or legitimate interests of the data subject' (i.e. the child concerned). The counselling service would consider any request against the child's wishes, to be undermining the child's own right to privacy and confidentiality.

Counselling records, including process notes, may be requested by the courts during hearings about the welfare of children. If the School Counsellor is given a court order to appear in court or produce their process notes, they may obtain legal advice so that they can make representations to the court in the appropriate manner, to limit disclosure of non-relevant sensitive client information.

5.2 Child Protection

If a counsellor has potential child protection concerns, this could lead to a breach of confidentiality in the interests of the child's safety. Therefore as part of the initial assessment, the counsellor will explain the procedures and possible consequences of involvement by other agencies, and seek the client's views and consent. Records kept will acknowledge if a young person is on the Child Protection Register and, therefore, any further disclosures of this nature will be reported on to the Designated Safeguarding Lead within the school.

5.3 Evaluation and Reporting to Deputy Headteacher

The Deputy Headteacher and the school counsellor will meet regularly to review the service and address any weaknesses in the system.

5.4 Reporting to Governors

A termly report outlining the progress of the service will be made available to the Governors.

5.5 Complaints Procedure

In the first instance all complaints should be raised with the school following the usual school complaints procedure which can be found on the school website. If necessary, complaints alleging a breach of professional standards will be dealt with in accordance with the procedures outlined by the BACP (British Association of Counselling Professionals).