

ST JAMES

Senior Boys' School

Counselling Policy

Introduction

There is a strong body of evidence about the beneficial impact of all pupils having access to counselling support when necessary. The significant role schools can play in helping to promote the emotional health and wellbeing of pupils is now recognised, as outlined in the government document [Counselling in schools: a blueprint for the future Departmental advice for school leaders and counsellors - February 2016](#). Pupils experiencing stress or emotional problems may find it difficult to engage with the education process and reach their potential.

At any time pupils may need extra emotional support beyond the normal pastoral care offered by teaching staff. Pupils who have suffered bereavement, trauma, family break-up, who are young carers, or are experiencing other emotional difficulties may appreciate the opportunity to speak to an adult who is not directly involved with their education. School based counselling provides that opportunity and offers pupils a comfortable, non-judgemental and confidential space to talk about their difficulties, so they do not become a block to their learning and self-development.

A counselling service that is responsive to pupils' needs and operates as an integral part of a school's pastoral care provision requires a collaborative and cooperative partnership. In the case of St James Senior Boys' School the key parties to this partnership are the Headmaster, the Safeguarding Team and the counsellor, with the Designated Safeguarding Lead being the main point of contact.

Key Individuals

Counsellor – Annette Door – Registered Clinical Member with the following professional bodies UKCP, BACP, UPCA – working according to their ethical guidelines and practice.

Headmaster	-	David Brazier
DSL	-	James Johnson – Assistant Headmaster (Pastoral)
DDSL	-	Alice Wood – SENDCo
DDSL	-	David Beezadhur – Deputy Headmaster.
DDSL	-	Susan Harman - School Nurse

Counselling procedure at St James Senior Boys School

Any pupil may attend counselling, at any time, during their time at St James Senior Boys' School.

The school funds a set number of paid sessions per week for the counsellor. These are for booked assessments of new referrals and any emergency referrals. These 'paid for' sessions are intended for one off use by the pupil. Any future counselling sessions will be paid for by the parents, in agreement with the school counsellor. In addition, school funded lunchtime 'drop-in' sessions are available. These are intended to provide information and short-term support to pupils and not intended as an alternative to counselling

Pupils can be referred to the school counsellor by a parent, member of staff, or can self-refer.

A member of staff who wishes to make a referral must discuss it first with the DSL and seek their agreement before the pupil is then approached, this is often done by the DSL directly. This approach values the pupil and respects his right to be involved in decisions: it is child centred. Counselling is not compulsory and a pupil may choose whether or not to attend. School Counselling is not a disciplinary measure and must not be used as such. Staff can encourage a self-referral having discussed the pupil with the DSL first.

On most occasions consent will be gained from the parents, particularly where sessions are ongoing. However there may be times when parental consent is not appropriate, such as in emergencies or when the pupil wishes to make a disclosure. At such times, the pupil can self-refer, this process follows the Gillick Competency Principle.

Under the Gillick Competency Principle, young people aged 16 and under have the right to access confidential counselling without parental knowledge or consent, provided they are of sufficient intelligence to understand what is being proposed and the potential consequences. Most secondary students are deemed intelligent enough to understand the counselling process. The counsellor and school will complete an assessment, using Fraser guidelines to ascertain if the student is Gillick competent. A guide to the Fraser guidelines can be seen in Appendix 1.

If a student is deemed not to be Gillick Competent, written consent from their parent will be required before counselling can begin.

The school counsellor will make every effort to inform and encourage students of the benefits of informing their parent(s) that they are receiving counselling, unless this is detrimental to their safety and wellbeing.

Counselling is confidential and an important part of the therapeutic process. The school counsellor will inform the parents of their child's progress but will not discuss the pupil's counselling process; i.e.; their personal thoughts and feelings. The school counsellor will not generally encourage ongoing contact with parents or attend meetings about their child (unless there is the necessity for a multi-agency safeguarding approach). Experience tells us that, even in circumstances where students wholeheartedly agree to this contact, the contact tends to diminish students' trust in the counsellor and alter their perception of counselling as 'their space'. It can also lead the counsellor to detract from the student's agenda for counselling.

If parents have concerns about counselling, they can speak to the School Counsellor or may contact the Designated Safeguarding Lead – James Johnson.

After an initial assessment session the counsellor will, in most situations that do not raise a safeguarding concern, contact the pupil's parents with a recommendation for a number of ongoing sessions. This will also include an outline of the counselling process and will allow for any questions to be asked. The parents will then agree to the funding of the proposed number of sessions. On some occasions two or more assessment sessions may be required and school funded time will be used for these, prior to contacting the parents.

Sessions normally take place weekly, or fortnightly, depending on the level of need, as assessed by the counsellor. This will be agreed with the pupil, parent (where appropriate) and counsellor. Sessions run in line with the school timetable and normally last 50 minutes. Pupils are informed of their appointment slot via email and confidential registration notes to Tutors. Parents may also be emailed. Regular reviews of the pupil's progress in school counselling are given to parents by the School Counsellor. The review will discuss recommendations to continue or end the counselling relationship, or to refer to an external professional such as CAMHS. This may be recommended if it is deemed beneficial to obtain a psychiatric or educational assessment for the pupil or to recommend family support such as a family therapist.

Pupils may withdraw from counselling at any time and this is made clear throughout the process, however they are encouraged to discuss this at their counselling session, or with another adult, rather than by non-attendance. In addition to this, pupils who regularly fail to attend their sessions are identified in weekly meetings between the counsellor and safeguarding team. These pupils are then spoken to and it is determined why they are not attending. There can then be a conversation about whether sessions should continue or how to help them attend. If a pupil chooses to end counselling the pastoral team will look at any need for alternative support either within or outside of the school.

Sharing of information

Records of pupils who have attended sessions, and notes from those sessions, are kept securely in the Counselling room. Only the School counsellor has access to these files.

Pupils who access the Counselling Service have the right to see information recorded about them by the school counsellor. The only exception is if a disclosure of information would be likely to cause serious harm to the student. Students cannot see information which is considered third party, or records concerning another person, unless that person has agreed. Where students wish to see their file, they should ask the counsellor and the counsellor should be present to explain what the file contains and the reasons why.

The School Counsellor will share the appointment list weekly with the DSL. This may include key information about individual pupils for safeguarding purposes. The sharing of this information will be with the consent of the pupil, unless not sharing the information is likely to cause serious harm to the pupil.

Before confidentiality is breached without the pupil's consent, the Counsellor may discuss the reasons for this action with their external Clinical Supervisor. The Counsellor will give the DSL the relevant information. Any breach of confidentiality should be about the immediate situation and information should only be shared with those services that can provide appropriate and timely support to the pupil. The counsellor will follow the school's safeguarding and child protection procedure and will remain at the school as long as necessary to support the pupil through the disclosure process.

The DSL will be an active partner in any decision making where a pupil's safety or welfare is considered at risk: this includes acts of self-harm or expression of suicidal thoughts / ideologies.

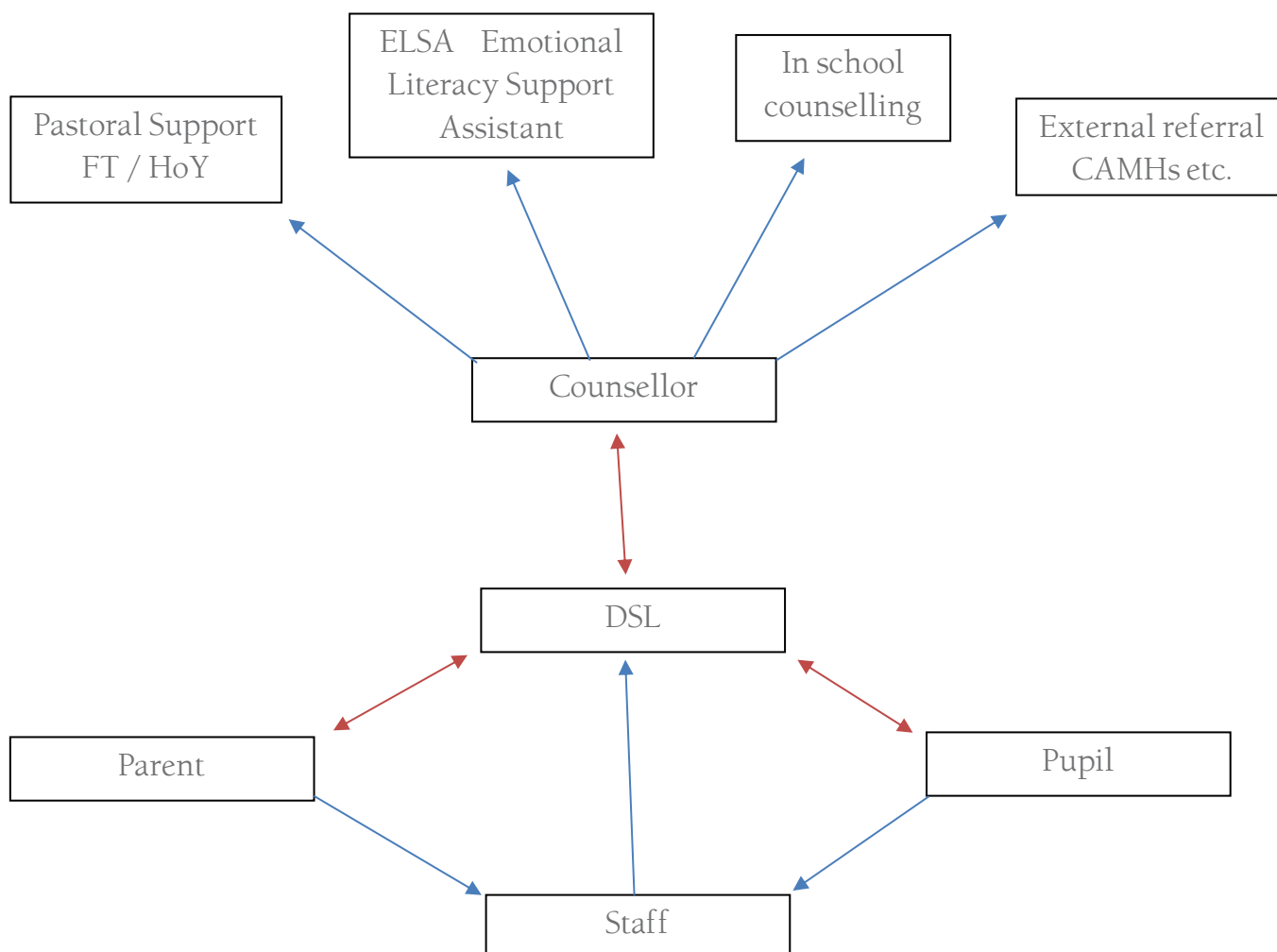
The counsellor will log all revisions or changes made to the confidentiality agreement with the pupil on the case file. This is necessary to track actions taken, outcomes and implications.

As mentioned above, specific information about sessions is not generally shared with parents. But this will be at the discretion of the counsellor, following the general principles of sharing information with the school safeguarding team.

Appendix 1 - Assessing competence to consent by children and young people

Factors to consider	Checklist for questions
<u>Immediate issues</u>	
Child's age: Gillick test:	How old is the child or young person? Does the child or young person understand the counselling? Are they refusing to allow their parents to be involved? Do their best interests require that the counselling be given without parental consent?
<u>Short-term issues</u>	
Nature of contact: Support systems: Nature of immediate issue or problem: Child protection responsibilities:	Is the contact with the counsellor controlled entirely by the child or young person? What support does the child or young person have access to alongside or in the place of counselling or therapy, should contact be broken or withdrawn? What is the degree of risk, if any, posed by the child to him or herself or to others (e.g. drugs, abuse, suicide, arson?) Is the risk significant, immediate or longer term? Is the counsellor required by their conditions of employment, or agency policy, to report all suspected child abuse to social services?
<u>Longer-term issues:</u>	
Stage of cognitive and emotional development:	Does the child or young person understand the nature of the issue or problem? Their own needs and the needs of others? The risks and benefits of counselling or therapy? Does the child or young person have a sense of their own identity? A sense of time, past, present and future? Source: Jenkins, 1997: 216-7 (abbreviated version)

Appendix 2 – Referral and Support Flow Chart



Policy Written by	James Johnson, Assistant Headmaster Pastoral
Reviewed by	Annette Door, School Counsellor
Approved by	Headmaster
Date	6 th June 2022