

GDST School Counselling Policy

Introduction

Good emotional and mental health and wellbeing is a key requirement to our pupils' happiness and success, both during their school career and in the future, and school-based counselling has been proved to be an effective means of improving pupils' mental health and emotional wellbeing and enhances pupils' capacity to study and learn[1].

As an organisation educating 20,000 girls, it is inevitable that many of our pupils will need help and advice from time-to-time. The excellent support networks provided by the schools' pastoral teams and school nurses amply fulfils this need for most pupils. However a small, but increasing number of pupils have complex mental health issues that need specialist support from professionally trained counsellors to help them through difficult periods. To this end the GDST Trustees consider it essential that all schools provide their pupils with access to a professional, fully qualified counselling support service on the school premises.

[1] Cooper, M. (2013) School-based counselling in UK Secondary Schools: A review and critical evaluation, Lutterworth: BACP/Counselling MindEd.

Application of the Policy

This policy applies to all GDST schools, including all junior schools; there is strong evidence that mental health issues are presenting at younger ages, and professional intervention at an early stage are very beneficial.

The GDST academies are encouraged to follow the principles of the policy.

Aims of the Policy

All schools to adopt a consistent approach with regard to the provision of professional, confidential counselling support services;

All schools to continue to provide excellent pastoral provision so that they can fully support the mental and emotional needs of all pupils;

All schools to provide specialist, professional, confidential counselling services for pupils with complex mental health issues;

All schools to have systems in place to identify girls that need specialised mental health support at an early stage and refer them to the appropriate person/service; and
All schools to fulfil parents' expectations that appropriate mental health support systems are provided within the school.

Provision

All schools will provide a dedicated, professional counselling support service for pupils. This provision will be complimentary to, and in addition to, the invaluable support services provided by the school nurse, the pastoral teams and on-line counselling support / initiatives provided by some schools.

The counselling provision should be proportionate to the number of pupils requiring specialised support, and the type and complexity of their needs and this may change over time. Some schools may have counsellors in school for a few hours every day of the week; others may only need them to come into school once or twice a week.

The counsellor(s) could be employed by the school or be freelance. It is not envisaged that all schools will have a full time counsellor on the pay roll.

The counsellor(s) should be totally independent i.e. not a member of school staff with other duties / responsibilities in school and not directly connected to any pupil or member of staff at the school. This is to ensure pupil confidentiality and to avoid any barriers (real or perceived) to pupils seeking support.

Counselling support should be available to pupils of all ages, not just senior school pupils.

Referrals will often be made by the school nurse, pastoral team or at the parents' request, but pupils in year 7 and above should also be able to easily and confidentially self-refer, e.g. by email or anonymous message book. Due to their age, junior school pupils will need parental consent before a referral is made, however they should be informed that they can request a referral, e.g. via their form tutor or the school nurse.

Whilst it is good practice to involve parents and families wherever possible, in some circumstances a pupil may not wish to have her parents involved with any interventions or therapies she is receiving. Pupils aged 16 and above are entitled to consent to their own treatment and parents cannot over rule this. Children under 16 can consent to their own treatment if they have enough intelligence, competence and understanding to fully appreciate what is involved in their treatment. This will almost certainly be the case for all GDST pupils in Year 7 and above (Gillick competency).

The counsellors should work in partnership with the pastoral teams at the school, with parents and with outside agencies. For example they could be invited to advise pastoral staff on mental health problems, assess girls for referrals, advise on the PSHE programme, on preventative measures, and run workshops, assemblies and parent groups.

All schools should develop guidelines for pastoral staff to ensure they know when and how to refer pupils to the counsellors for specialised support.

The counselling service should be based on the school premises in order to facilitate easy access for all pupils.

Consideration should be given to making counselling support available in the school holidays so that pupils who are already receiving support can continue their programme outside of term-time.

This can either be on the school premises or at a convenient off-site location.

Communication and Confidentiality

Good communication between the counsellors, pastoral team and school nurse is vital in order that a holistic team approach can be adopted to support the pupils. However confidentiality will be very important for some issues and some pupils. Clear expectations regarding communication should be agreed at the outset between all parties.

Issues that need to be considered to promote pupil confidentiality are:

Referral process – schools should provide senior school pupils with the option to self-refer to the counsellors.

Appointment procedures – procedures that give the option for anonymity should be adopted, e.g. email appointment requests direct to counsellors or anonymous appointment book.

Location of counselling room – the counsellors should either be based in a discreet location or in a room used for a wide variety of purposes.

Reporting procedures – procedures should take into account confidentiality issues, but all parties (pupil, counsellor, school nurse and pastoral team) need to be aware that safeguarding issues trump confidentiality issues.

Charges – Appointments should be free of charge to pupils so that there is no need for parents to be informed.

Safeguarding Policy – Counsellors should be familiar with the school's Safeguarding policy and procedures.

Counsellors – Qualifications, Insurance and Clinical Supervision

In order to ensure that all counselling support is high quality and will improve the outcomes for the pupils, schools need to have a robust commissioning process that ensures the counsellors are suitably qualified and accredited. The Young Minds website offers a catalogue of resources for commissioning

support services All counsellors should be fully qualified. The minimum qualification is a Level 4 Diploma in Counselling / Psychotherapy plus accreditation with one of the professional bodies: BACP, UKCP, BPS etc.

Ideally, counsellors should have a Level 7 Diploma and a Postgraduate Qualification (preferably at Masters Level, otherwise at Postgrad. Diploma Level) in Child and Adolescent Counselling / Psychotherapy or a Postgraduate Qualification specifically in School Counselling (these are normally designed for those who have trained to work with adults and want to work in schools). In addition it is useful for counsellors to have training in play therapy or creative therapies, especially if they will be working with younger children.

All counsellors should be covered by Professional Indemnity and Public Liability Insurance and should regularly participate in Clinical Supervision, preferably with a supervisor who works with children and young people.

Time Scales

Many schools already have professional counselling services in place; those that do not should work towards having a service in place for September 2015.

Guidance

A guidance document on the practical application of this policy can be found in the related documents