

Counselling and Wellbeing Policy



**Stonehill Avenue
Birstall
LE4 4JG**

September 2023

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 There is a strong body of evidence indicating 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. Learners experiencing stress or emotional problems find it difficult to engage with the education process and to reach their potential. Where schools' staff can recognise and respond appropriately to their needs the educational outcome is maximised.

1.2 At any time pupils may need extra emotional support beyond the normal pastoral care offered by teachers. Learners who have suffered bereavement, trauma, family break-up or who are young carers may appreciate the opportunity to speak to an adult. School based counselling provides that opportunity.

1.3 The counselling support provided conforms to high professional standards and current best practice for school based counselling, specifically in respect of counsellor qualifications, supervision policy, safeguarding practices and continuous professional development.

1.4 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 ALP Leicester the key parties to this partnership are the Headteacher, Senior Management Team, the main contact person within the school's staff for counselling (Designated Safeguarding Lead) and the counsellor.

1.5 In the following sections the roles of the individual partners and the expectations in respect of pupils and parents are described along with current practice and procedures.

2. SERVICE DELIVERY PARTNER: SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM

2.1 The support of the Senior Management Team (SMT) is critical to the operation of an effective counselling service in a school. This support can be visible in acknowledging the contribution that counselling can make to promoting the emotional wellbeing of learners and encouraging pupils, parents and staff to make appropriate use of the intervention. Less visible, yet equally important, is the support given to the Designated Safeguarding Lead and the counsellor in timetabling suitable accommodation for counselling and time for both to review pupils' needs, in monthly meetings or as needed.

2.2 This staff member is the counsellor's main point of contact within the school for Child Protection. The appointed person should be acknowledged as approachable by pupils. A Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead is named to provide cover when the Designated Safeguarding Lead is absent or unavailable.

2.3 The Headteacher, in consultation with the Designated Safeguarding Lead will agree, in consultation with the counsellor, when parental consent will be sought for a pupil to access counselling. Parents will be advised of the service via the parent mail and a generalised consent sought when it is judged that counselling for a particular pupil would be useful. It is a requirement of the BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) that consent is required if a pupil is aged 16 or under.

2.4 The Executive Board is aware that pupils have access to counselling and how the service operates.

2.5 The counsellor will be provided annually with copies of relevant school policies such as child protection, discipline including anti-bullying measures, use of the internet, use of mobile phones and parental consent.

2.6 The introduction to staff takes place at a general staff meeting and the key elements of the role of counsellor is explained. Pupils are introduced individually to the counsellor by the learner's teacher/tutor.

2.7 The policy for involving parents in the counselling process, including how parents will be informed about the service, how referrals can be made and how consent will be managed is as follows:

- Parents will be advised of the counselling service to be used via Parent Mail and through school contact
- The counsellor and the DSL meet as and when required to discuss on-going sessions taking place between counsellor and pupils.)
- Parents will be contacted by the counsellor to discuss the pupil concerned and the scope of the counselling service and its protocols. A copy of the counselling policy will be made available.
- A written consent form will be signed by the parents agreeing for counselling sessions to take place. Parents will be given the opportunity to meet the counsellor at a mutually agreed time if needed.

2.8 A room or location suitable for counselling young people which meets the need for confidentiality and acknowledges safeguarding requirements has been designated for use by the counsellor. The same room/location will be available every week for continuity of service.

3. DELIVERY OF COUNSELLING SERVICE

3.1 The Counsellor is qualified to at least Diploma level in counselling. The counsellor has an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service's Certificate prior to commencing employment and attends child protection training organised by ALP Leicester. The counsellor has many years of experience of working with young people and is approachable, has good listening skills and a manner that encourages a climate for safe and trusting relationships.

3.2 The presence of the same counsellor every week ensures continuity of the counselling intervention for learners and the development of a relationship of trust and confidence based on a shared understanding of the counselling process with the DSL, pupils and staff.

3.3 The counsellor is covered by Professional Indemnity Insurance and is provided with regular clinical and managerial supervision which complies with agreed professional practice standards. Ensure a response to urgent referrals

3.4 All requests for the service will receive a response within 5 working days. When a pupil needs to be seen urgently there will be a response within the school day or, if the request is received outside school hours, the next working day. Drop in sessions will be available throughout the week. The Head and DSL are aware that counselling is not always an appropriate response in an emergency situation and that referral to a General Practitioner (GP) or other Child Protection policy actions may be required.

4. SERVICE DELIVERY PARTNER: Designated Safeguarding Lead Officer (DSL)

4.1 The DSL is appointed by the Head and, ideally, is a member of the school's SMT.

4.2 Referrals to counselling from staff, parents or self-referrals should be placed on the waiting list. New referrals are discussed with the counsellor at monthly meetings and the waiting list reviewed, although more pressing cases can be discussed between meetings. The priority for each pupil awaiting counselling is

reassessed and, if there is any new relevant information about a pupil, who is engaged in counselling or on the waiting list, this is shared. Schedule counselling sessions for pupils.

4.3 The Counsellor should keep an individual record for referred pupils. The file will contain the parental consent details (if applicable), the number of sessions attended and a note of any follow up action required or agreed by the counsellor, school, young person or other agencies. The records are held securely in a locked filing cabinet in the DSL's office and are retained until the pupil leaves the school. The counsellor should take appropriate action on child protection referrals.

4.4 The content of a counselling session remains "confidential" unless a disclosure is made of child abuse or if a pupil's safety or welfare is considered at risk: this includes acts of self harm or suicidal ideation. In such circumstances the school's child protection procedures will be used. The counsellor will advise the DSL of a disclosure or any 'at risk' concerns that should be recorded on the schools safeguarding form. The DSL should tell the counsellor when a referral is made to social services or if other action is taken. Keep the Senior Leadership Team briefed on progress.

4.5 At the end of each academic year, the Headteacher/ DSL will receive a report from the counsellor detailing the number of sessions provided, key issues arising and identifying any recurring themes. This is used as a basis to brief the Senior Management Team about counselling provision in the school.

5. SERVICE DELIVERY PARTNER: COUNSELLOR

5.1 The counsellor has a Diploma in Counselling, or equivalent from a recognised validating organisation, is experienced in working with young people, follows the ethical framework of a professional body and receives appropriate clinical supervision.

5.2 The counsellor will be available in the school/location at the agreed time each week, be contactable for urgent referrals and advise the DSL of any changes in contact details. Referrals for counselling will be accepted in line with the agreed methods.

5.3 An understanding of the counselling process and how it can best be used to support learners will be provided for school staff. This can be done through meeting groups of staff, awareness sessions on staff training days or informal contact in the staff room. Promote awareness of counselling with parents.

5.4 An awareness of the counselling service will be promoted with parents.

5.5 All counselling work will be undertaken within the BACP ethical framework of the professional body.

5.6 All safeguarding concerns, including suspected or alleged abuse, must be reported to the DSL.

5.7 When the need for a referral to another agency or service is identified the DSL will be advised. The agreement on who will make the referral will be in line with existing school policies.

5.8 An accurate record of individual sessions with pupils will be held on the client's file. The files will include an accurate record of main issues discussed, key decisions reached, actions to be taken and outcomes. The record will also hold details of approaches used and any agreement reached with the pupil. The files are stored securely. Contribute to annual report on service provision.

5.9 The counsellor maintains and develops professional practice through regular and ongoing clinical supervision and appropriate training.

6. COUNSELLING – LEARNERS’ PERSPECTIVE

6.1 Learners and their needs are at the centre of the counselling process. Learners can only benefit if they wish to engage in counselling.

6.2 The counselling relationship provides the opportunity to talk in private about anything that is of concern to a young person. The counsellor is there to assist in exploring choices and to support learners to make their own decisions and will not be judgemental. At the beginning of a counselling relationship, the pupil and the school counsellor will enter into an agreement. This clearly sets out the boundaries of a school-based counselling service and ensures the pupil actively works in partnership with the counsellor in case planning, decision making, reviewing and evaluation.

6.3 While talking is the basis of most counselling sessions, in the course of a counselling session the counsellor may propose to use different strategies and techniques to explore feelings, such as emotions cards, role play, art therapy. The counsellor will always explain what the method is, how it might benefit and will seek the pupil’s agreement. Learners should understand that they can say ‘no’ and that the counsellor should be told if they feel uncomfortable or distressed.

6.4 Confidentiality: It is important that the learner understands the meaning of confidentiality. Whatever has been discussed with the counsellor will be kept confidential except in very specific circumstances. These circumstances are explained to learners and why a disclosure of abuse or ‘at risk’ concerns must be shared with the appropriate authorities.

6.5 Learners will be very clear that they can refuse counselling at the outset or at any stage during their involvement. Learners should be advised that there are other sources of help and counselling outside the school which they can access.

6.7 The learner can have an initial assessment meeting with the counsellor to determine if counselling would be appropriate for them.

6.8 Before counselling intervention can start, parental consent is required. The school’s policy on this should be explained and how consent is to be sought.

6.9 Consent on the part of the learner is a prerequisite to the formation of an effective counselling relationship. The counsellor will always confirm with a learner at the outset of a counselling session that they wish to continue.

6.10 Counselling works best when parents know their child is seeking counselling and are supportive of the process. Learners will be encouraged to share their engagement with counselling with parents.

6.11 At the start of counselling, during the course of a series of sessions, and at the end, a learner will be asked to assess their state of wellbeing. This assessment is used by the counsellor to plan sessions, determine progress and to evaluate the outcome of counselling for the learners.

6.12 A review of how the service is operating in a school may include pupils' views on all aspects of the provision.

7. COUNSELLING – PARENTS' PERSPECTIVE

7.1 Counselling works best when parents know that their child is seeking counselling and are supportive of the process. Counsellors will encourage learners to tell their parents that they are seeking counselling and to share with them, as appropriate, the experience of the counselling intervention. The parent(s) is ideally introduced to the counsellor in person.

7.2 Parents should know that they can refer their son/daughter for counselling support and that it should be arranged in consultation with the DSL. Parents should be aware that sessions will only be taken forward if the young person agrees to engage in the process. The wish to continue with counselling will be confirmed by the counsellor at the outset of every session.

7.3 Parents should also be informed that school staff may make referrals, via the Head and DSL, and that pupils can self refer to the service.

7.4 Parents should be informed about the school's policy on consent and on how and when consent will be sought.

7.5 Parents must be made aware that the content of counselling sessions remains confidential between the counsellor and the learner unless the welfare or safety of the learner is considered to be at risk of significant harm.

8. SERVICE PROVISION – PRACTICE AND PROCEDURES Referral by School Staff

8.1 A member of staff who wishes to make a referral must discuss it first with the Head or DSL and seek their agreement before the pupil is then approached. This approach values the pupil and respects his right to be involved in decisions. 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 Head and DSL first.

8.2 Often issues raised in counselling by pupils are complex and frequently being explored for the first time. Ethical practice requires that the counselling session be sensitively managed with appropriate time allocated to a beginning, middle and end to the session. It is important this is respected by all and sessions should not be interrupted unless there is an emergency.

8.3 The number of sessions offered must be based on the need and agreed with the pupil as part of the review process. A review of the counselling intervention will take place after six sessions and a decision made on whether it should continue. This review will involve an assessment of the pupil's progress, motivation to continue and whether there is useful work still to be done.

8.4 The counsellor should deliver the service according to the 'Ethical Framework for Good Practice' of their professional body. This should cover areas such as supervision; record keeping (within data protection guidelines); and evaluation.

8.5 After the initial assessment, or indeed during any counselling session, it may become apparent that the pupil requires referral to specialist services. When a referral is required, the counsellor will keep the young person informed and seek permission to share information at all stages. No onward referrals will take place without the DSL's involvement or prior knowledge. Any decision about an onward referral, any relevant consultation and who will take the action will be recorded in the pupil's case notes.

8.6 If there is a safeguarding issue then the procedures in the school's Child Protection Policy will be followed.

8.7 At the beginning of a counselling relationship, the counsellor will explain confidentiality and its limitations to the pupil. This will clearly identify what confidentiality means in a way that is relevant to the pupil's maturity and level of understanding. Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed - the welfare of the pupil will, at all times, take precedence over confidentiality.

8.8 The counsellor will seek a pupil's consent in advance of any disclosure of information, which could be construed as a breach of confidentiality. The rationale for disclosure of the information and the implications of the process for the pupil should be explained. This process sustains the commitment to support the pupil's autonomy and capacity for informed consent at every stage of the counselling process. Any disclosure of information will be made in the pupil's best interest.

8.9 The counsellor will only disclose confidential information obtained from the counselling relationship in the following exceptional circumstances:

- The pupil requests, and feels that it is within his best interest, that certain information is passed on;
- Circumstances exist where the counsellor has sufficient grounds to believe that the pupil is suffering, or is likely to suffer, significant harm, for example, through neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, emotional abuse, domestic violence or drug abuse;
- The pupil discloses that they are aware of significant harm of another person;
- Suicidal ideation and or self harm are being disclosed.

8.10 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 child protection procedure and will remain at the school as long as necessary to support the pupil through the disclosure process.

8.11 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.

Clinical Supervision

8.15 The counsellor will have clinical supervision. Clinical supervision involves the counsellor meeting with a suitably qualified and experienced practitioner from the same discipline. At these meetings, professional practice is reviewed in the context of the counsellor's current caseload and the pupil's progress. Clinical supervision is intended to be both supportive and challenging.

8.16 Clinical Supervisors will be experienced practitioners, competent in supervising the approach used by the counsellor.

8.17 The counsellor will receive a minimum of 1½ hours clinical supervision per month, depending on the nature of the cases and experience of the counsellor. A list of all ongoing cases will be maintained by the counsellor and presented to the supervisor at the outset of the session. During the course of an intervention,

all cases will have been discussed at least once with the Clinical Supervisor and this will be recorded in case notes.

8.18 The counsellor will adhere to the Data Protection Act 2018 which covers paper records and notes held on computer systems where individuals are identified. In all aspects of data protection and record keeping, the child's welfare is paramount and will remain the priority for the counsellor delivering the provision.

8.19 The counsellor must keep case notes about what has been discussed in the session(s). These notes are part of the individual pupil's file and will be treated as confidential. Any disclosure of a safeguarding nature will be recorded on the pupil's file together with details of the parties with whom information was shared and any other action taken. Information provided about any relevant change in the pupil's circumstances between sessions, any telephone calls made on behalf of the pupil or other action taken will be recorded. The file will also contain a record of attendance at sessions, record of any sessions missed and a copy of the pupil's agreement to engage in the process.

8.20 The pupils' files are kept secure in the premises of the counselling service that is used.

8.21 The pupil's file is the property of ALP Leicester and it is the school's responsibility to ensure that it is stored securely until it is destroyed.

8.22 The counsellor will record statistical information on client gender, age, ethnicity, reason for referral and other details. This information will be made available to the Headteacher and DSL annually, or on request in response to specific queries.

9. COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

9.1 ALP Leicester is required to have a complaints procedure.

9.2 Complaints should be raised directly by either the Headteacher or the DSL with the counsellor.

9.3 The counsellor is required to practice within the standards imposed by their relevant professional body – BACP (British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy). Anyone who has a concern or complaint about the counsellor's professional practice can raise it directly with BACP. Procedure

9.4 If a learner, parent or member of staff makes a complaint about the counselling practice or behaviour of the counsellor the DSL will explain the complaints procedure and confirm that a formal complaint is to proceed. The DSL will prepare a written statement of the complaint and seek consent from the person making the complaint before proceeding.

9.5 The Headteacher should be advised of the complaint. Where the complaint is made by a named pupil(s) then the parents should be informed of the position by the Headteacher, in line with the school's consent policy and the wishes of the pupil.

9.6 ALP Leicester will carry out an internal review in line with their complaints procedure, the nature of the complaint and the facts will be established from both the complainant and the counsellor.

