

Policy Title: Counselling Service Policy

Mortimer



Leader:

Mr S Liddle

Review Date:

Sept 2026

Counselling Service – Policy and Procedures

Introduction

The School Counselling Service is designed to complement the strengths of Mortimer's pastoral system by offering additional personal support to students who may benefit from working with a professional counsellor. The Counselling Service will support students as far as possible to make their own choices and decisions regarding counselling, and will involve parents in counselling, provided this is consistent with the best interests of the student concerned. The Service recognises that students have the right to confidentiality in counselling, and that this is essential for maintaining trust with the counsellor, but accepts that confidentiality is not absolute and safeguarding all students must always be at the forefront of its work. This policy complies with key legislation.

In line with nationally agreed standards for school-based counselling, the school counsellor has an enhanced DBS check, is a qualified counsellor who holds membership with the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and is bound by the BACP's Ethical Framework for Good Practice.

Definitions and terms used within the policy (see Appendix).

Aims and Objectives

To ensure involved adults respect the rights and importance of students participating in counselling on a voluntary, informed consent basis.

The Role of the Counsellor

The key priority of the counsellor's job role is to provide an independent and confidential counselling service to students through individual sessions, responding to their personal, social, emotional and/or educational concerns. The counsellor will provide a supportive and caring environment where such concerns may be explored, whereby promoting the mental and emotional health at Mortimer Community College. The counsellor will maintain confidentiality (except in those circumstances, in line with BACP practice, where this should be breached), will play an active role in Safeguarding children and will adhere to the guidance from Mortimer Community College to school policies. The counsellor will uphold good practice as described by the BACP ethical guidance and will liaise with staff and other agencies with student consent. They will draw on different theoretical approaches for their work which, along with person centred care, can involve elements of CBT, Gestalt but not limited to, so they have a more integrative approach. Each session is student led; the counsellor does not lead, give advice or tell them what to do. It is always the student's choice but the counsellor will find a collaborative way of working together depending on the individual issues of each student and what they bring to sessions. If students do require a more direct approach, such as CBT for OCD or similar, the counsellor would take to supervision and if a referral was in the student's best interest, this would be carried out with their consent.

Parental Involvement

Counselling in school can be offered to all students who request help through their Head of Year. Before counselling can occur, all students in Key Stage 3 will only be able to have counselling with parental consent which will be liaised with the Head of Year and a first initial phone call to the parent by the counsellor. Students who are in Key Stage 4 and who are deemed Gillick competent are entitled to confidential services including in-school counselling.

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 decide if the student is Gillick competent.

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.

The school counsellor will not generally encourage ongoing contact with parents or attend meetings about their child, however speaking to parents can be beneficial to the student as some find certain conversations difficult to have. This is only done so with the student's permission. Liaising with parents can also be helpful around support between sessions.

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 may contact the relevant Head of Year.

Safeguarding and Child Protection

This document outlines the procedures to be followed by the counsellor when child protection concerns are brought to their attention, to ensure they protect and promote the safety and welfare of all students and to help foster confidence in the integrity of the Counselling Service.

1. The student is told at the start of their first session that the contents of each counselling session remain confidential between the student and school counsellor, unless the student makes a disclosure deemed reportable by Keeping Children Safe in Education 2025 and our schools' internal policies, such as any form of child abuse and/or the counsellor considers that the student (or another individual) is at risk of significant harm, including self-harm and suicidal ideation/suicide attempts. The counsellor is required by law to report suspicions about terrorism, serious drug trafficking and money laundering and may be required to break student confidentiality if a court orders disclosure. The student will sign a counselling written agreement acknowledging terms where confidentiality may be broken.
2. A brief confidentiality statement will be displayed in the counselling room.
3. Where there are significant concerns about students (or third parties), the school counsellor will follow procedures laid out in the school's Child Protection Policy, referring concerns to the school's Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) or Deputy DSL's or Deputy and/or Head Teacher. These persons will, in consultation with the counsellor and possibly other relevant staff, make a decision of any further action to be taken.
4. The school counsellor will make every reasonable attempt to communicate first to the student their intention to break confidentiality and to discuss the information that needs to be shared. If such conversations cannot take place, the matter should be discussed with the student at the earliest opportunity following referral to the DSL or Deputy and/or Head Teacher.
5. The school counsellor may seek specialist advice and guidance on safeguarding/child protection issues from Mortimer's DSL Mr Liddle or Deputy DSL's Mrs Constable or Mr Mallam.

Confidentiality – Staff. The well-being of all students is something that we take seriously at Mortimer Community College. A student may choose to request that the counsellor informs specific staff members (whether pastoral, support, or teaching staff) that they are having a

hard time, in order to feel more fully supported. In these instances, no further specific details are discussed with the staff member without the expressed permission of the student.

Communication

Key pastoral, teaching and support staff will be made aware of this policy.

The counselling policy will be put on the school website and shared with all staff, parents and carers. Students will be made aware of the counselling provision through communication with form tutors and Heads of Year.

Referral Process

Self-referral by students:

Students may get a referral to the counsellor through communication with their Head of Year. The Head of Year will then complete an electronic or hand written referral form and give it to the school counsellor. The counsellor will assess the priority of the referral and grade it 1 to 3, 1 being an urgent referral and 3 being that the student can join the waiting list. The counsellor will contact the student to do an initial assessment to ascertain the support needed. In the eventuality of an influx of requests, the referral will go through to the Head of Year and then communicated with the Key Stage co-ordinator to see if there is additional support that can be given in the interim period.

Referral by Parents:

Parents may also request to make a referral for their child. Again, this will be carried out through liaising with the Head of Year where an electronic or written referral will be made to the counsellor. It is essential that parents have discussed the referral with their child, who at the very least has agreed to attend a no-obligation introductory/assessment session with the school counsellor. Parents may try to withdraw consent but if the student still insists on accessing the service then they are within their right to do so in Key Stage 4 (if deemed Gillick competent). In this instance, the Head of Year will liaise with the parent and child to refer them to an external agency if needed.

Multi-Agency referral:

If the counsellor feels that the student they are working with could benefit from further intervention from external agencies, due to an issue being outside of their expertise, they will communicate this with the student and parent and will then make that referral. If there is a waiting list for an external agency, the counsellor can continue to hold sessions in school with them until the sessions with the external agency begins.

There will be no cross counselling between the school counsellor and external agencies unless there have been special considerations put in place.

What Does Counselling Look Like?

Counselling takes place sitting with the counsellor in the counselling room at Mortimer Community College. The aims are:

- to provide an independent and confidential counselling service to students through individual sessions, responding to their personal, social, emotional or educational concerns.
- to promote a caring and supportive environment where such concerns may be explored, thereby promoting the mental and emotional health of students at Mortimer Community College.
- to maintain confidentiality (except in those circumstances, in line with the schools Safeguarding and Child Protection policies and in line with BACP practice, where this should be breached). For a full definition see BACP – <https://www.bacp.co.uk/media/2637/bacp-what-is-counselling-psychotherapy-c2.pdf>
- to uphold good practice as described by the BACP ethical guidelines (see appendix 2).
- to make referrals, where appropriate and with the students consent, to other agencies.
- to liaise, where appropriate and with the student's consent, with members of staff.
- to maintain appropriate records and to keep these secure.
- to play an active role in Safeguarding children and adhere with guidance from Mortimer Community College, to school policies.
- to contribute in any other reasonable fashion to promote the safety and wellbeing of the students.

Duration: the length and frequency of individual sessions can vary, depending on the needs of individual students and Mortimer Community College's timetabling structure. Sessions tend to be bi-weekly and last normally a full 1-hour lesson. Should everything the student needs to discuss be covered then future sessions can be shorter. A therapeutic hour is 50 minutes which leaves time for organising the next week's appointment. Students attending will be given a slip with a date and time of their session to show staff in case they are seen in the corridor midway through a lesson.

The number of sessions a student may have can vary from a one-off drop-in session to resolve an immediate concern, to bi-weekly sessions generally up to a maximum of 6 sessions, after which the counsellor will review the students' progress.

Review: consistent with the principles of the person-centred counselling approach, the school counsellor shall regard review as an ongoing process and encourage students to reflect on whether counselling is meeting the desired outcomes as they go along, as well as when they end.

Endings

All students have the right to withdraw from counselling at any time and it is the responsibility of all involved adults to make this explicit to them.

Where a student has not attended three consecutive counselling sessions, the counsellor will approach the student to ascertain their wishes and feelings about participation. A decision will be made about the student's continuing involvement in counselling. After ending, the counsellor, the school or parents cannot make a student engage even if they think the student needs it. The time might not be right for them and they may want to revisit either school counselling or another agency further down the road. During the conversation at ending, or if they decide not to come back if they feel it is not working yet still need support, the counsellor can explore options/services available to them. If a student presents with an issue that is out of the counsellor's competence such as an eating disorder or severe depression which may require medication or at least a second opinion, then they will look at a referral to the most appropriate service for them. Although the counsellor uses certain measuring tools as a guide, they cannot diagnose.

Mortimer Community College counsellor – Miss A.Dinning
Designated Safeguarding Lead – Mr S.Liddle

Appendix 1: Legislation and Guidance

The counselling policy and guidelines are shaped by, and comply with, key pieces of legislation and guidance, which include, but are not limited to:

- School Child Protection Policy
- Gillick Competence/Fraser Guidelines (1985)
<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/media/1541/gillick-competency-factsheet.pdf>
- Children Act (1989; 2006)
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989)
- Education Act (2011)
- Data Protection Act (2018)
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (2025)
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023)
- BACP Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling & Psychotherapy (2018)
- Essential Guide for Leaders Providing School-Based Counselling (2023)
- School-Based Counselling: The Essential Guide for Schools (November 2023)

Appendix 2: Summary of Ethical Principles for Counsellors and Psychotherapists

(BACP Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy)

Ethical Principle	
Being Trustworthy:	Honouring the trust placed in the practitioner
<u>Examples</u> Act in accordance with the trust placed in them. Strive to ensure that clients' expectations are ones that have reasonable prospects of being met. Honour their agreements and promises. Regard confidentiality as an obligation arising from the client's trust. Restrict disclosure of confidential information about clients to furthering the purposes for which it was originally disclosed.	
Autonomy:	Respecting the client's right to be self-governing
<u>Examples</u> Ensure accuracy within information given in advance of services offered. Seek freely given, and adequately informed, consent. Emphasise the value of voluntary participation in the services being offered. Engage in explicit contracting in advance of any commitment by the client. Protect privacy; protect confidentiality. Normally make any disclosures of confidential information conditional on the consent of the person concerned.	
Beneficence:	Commitment to promoting the client's wellbeing
<u>Examples</u> Acting strictly in the best interests of the client based on professional assessment.	

Working strictly within one's limits of competence, training and experience.
Using regular and ongoing supervision to enhance the quality of services provided.
Commitment to updating practice by continuing professional development.

An obligation to act in the best interests of a client may become paramount when working with clients whose capacity for autonomy is diminished because of immaturity, lack of understanding, extreme distress, serious disturbance or other significant personal constraints.

Non-maleficence: Commitment to avoiding harm to the client

Examples

Avoiding sexual, financial, emotional or any other form of client exploitation.

Avoiding incompetence or malpractice.

Not providing services when unfit to do so due to illness or personal circumstances.

Strive to mitigate any harm caused to a client even when the harm is unavoidable or unintended.

Challenging, where appropriate, the incompetence or malpractice of others.

Justice: Fair & impartial treatment of all clients & provision of adequate services

Examples

Being just and fair to all clients and respecting their human rights and dignity.

Considering conscientiously any legal requirements and obligations.

Remaining alert to potential conflicts between legal requirements and ethical obligations.

Appreciation of differences between people and a commitment to equality of opportunity.

Strive to ensure fair provision of services (accessible & appropriate to needs of clients).

Self-respect: Fostering the practitioner's self-knowledge and care for self

Examples

Appropriately applies all of the above principles as entitlements for self.

Includes seeking therapy and other opportunities for personal development as required.

Using supervision for personal and professional support and development.

Seeking training and other opportunities for continuing professional development.

Internal and External Supervision

Within school, the counsellor will report directly to the DSL in regards to their working practice.

In accordance with the BACP, the school counsellor will attend regular and ongoing supervision, with an appropriately trained counselling professional, who is external to the school, for the purpose of ensuring best practice and accountability.

When discussing issues relating to a particular student during supervision, the counsellor will take great care not to reveal the full name of the student or disclose any information that would enable the student and their family to be identified.

Appendix 3: Definitions and Terms Used in this Policy

Parent

The term 'parent' is used as an inclusive term to refer to all adults who take on a parenting role in relation to a particular student, including biological, adoptive, and foster parents, extended family and other professional care-givers such as staff from group homes.

Informed Consent

The term 'informed consent', as it applies to school counselling, can be defined as the voluntary agreement of a student to participate in counselling, or the voluntary agreement of their parent for the counselling to take place, based on these persons having adequate knowledge and understanding of the counselling process, including confidentiality.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality may be defined as "when a person(s) receives information, that information is kept private and not shared or disclosed without the consent of the person(s) they received it from. This policy covers not only information given deliberately by the person concerned, or by other people about the person, but also information acquired accidentally or through observation.

Appendix 4: Assessing Competence to Consent by Children and Young People

The following guidance is based on the Fraser Guidelines and adapted for application to counselling.

Factors to consider	Checklist for questions
<u>Immediate issues</u>	
Child's age:	How old is the child or young person?
Gillick test:	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:	Is the contact with the counsellor controlled entirely by the child or young person?
Support systems:	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?
Nature of immediate issue or problem:	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?
Child protection responsibilities:	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 and 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 5:

Record Keeping and Data Protection

Mortimer Community College Counselling Service keeps written records (CPOMS) about students in counselling. The notes are minimal, factual notes and do not contain your name or identifying information. Counselling records include material such as reasons for referral to counselling, number of sessions attended and an account of the topic discussed in each session (a brief sentence to reveal the core issue). They may also include reports of safeguarding issues. Notes on sessions are brought to (external) supervision.

Under GDPR regulations and Data Protection principles, information is:

- used fairly, lawfully and transparently
- used for specified, explicit purposes
- used in a way that is adequate, relevant and limited to only what is necessary
- accurate and, where necessary, kept up to date
- kept for no longer than is necessary
- handled in a way that ensures appropriate security, including protection against unlawful or unauthorised processing, access, loss, destruction or damage.

The school counsellor is responsible for ensuring that they record any child protection concerns which emerge during the course of a student's counselling via the CPOMS website. Records must clearly document all discussions with the student and third parties regarding the concerns, together with the key decisions reached during these conversations, actions to be taken and outcomes.

Counselling records are not held in the school central system but in a locked cabinet in the counselling room which is only accessible to the counsellor. Contact details are stored separately from case notes.

Counselling records are retained for a period which is informed by current DPA legislation and good practice within the education sector.