



## **ABERDEENSHIRE SCHOOL COUNSELLING SERVICE INFORMATION FOR SCHOOL STAFF**

2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020

### **What is counselling?**

Counselling provides a safe and confidential space for young people to talk to a trained professional about issues and concerns they face. The counsellor will help the young person explore their thoughts, feelings and actions so they can develop a better understanding of themselves and of others.

Being really listened to, and having feelings, worries or thoughts understood or clarified by somebody who is not directly involved in the young person's problems or concerns can be very helpful. Young people often find that having access to a regular time, space, and a caring adult, enables them to build a trusting relationship which helps them better understand themselves and it often aids them in forming meaningful connections with others.

Young people who suffer from trauma, attachment disorders or a significant number of childhood adversities can safely explore their experiences in a counselling relationship. Counselling may enable them to recalibrate their experiences and expectations of relationships, help them understand how and why they feel the way they do - which in turn can impact the formation of more healthful relationships and an understanding of their actions.

In counselling young people will not be offered advice or the counsellor's opinion. Instead, counselling enables young people to find their own solutions - whether that's making effective changes in their life and relationships or finding ways of coping with their problems.

### **What does a relationally-focused counsellor do?**

Counsellors build a therapeutic relationship with young people through really getting to know the individual, and they build trust by providing a consistent, confidential and bounded relationship. No two counselling relationships are the same, counsellors adapt the way they work to the needs and preferences of the young person. Counsellors listen without judgment and try to help young people understand their thoughts and feelings about whatever is concerning them. As well as listening, counsellors also help young people to clarify their problems or difficulties, and help young people see patterns in their relating, thinking and/or actions.

Strong and meaningful relationships with others is one of the building blocks of emotional wellbeing and emotional development. Relation-focused counsellors hold space for young people to safely explore what is bothering them, whilst facilitating age and stage appropriate reflection and insight.

Counsellors do not give advice or tell young people what to do, instead, they help young people make their own choices to facilitate personal growth and self-awareness. While external conditions may not substantially change for the young person, their feelings about themselves and their ability to meet the challenges they face can be significantly enhanced by relational counselling.



### **How many sessions will be offered?**

Young people will be offered ten regular sessions during the school day which usually last around 50 minutes each. There is some flexibility in this. Some people may only use a few sessions, and others might need more. The counsellor will check in with the young person regularly about their progress and how they feel about counselling.

### **How does this differ from the support already offered at the school?**

School Counselling is an intervention delivered by a trained professional with recognised qualifications in counselling, who receives clinical supervision, and practices with accountability, confidentiality and continued professional development.

All our counsellors are professionally trained and have experience working with young people therapeutically. They all belong to and abide by the ethics code of either COSCA (Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland) and / or the BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) which are professional bodies who support and regulate the profession.

CAMHS work with severely unwell young people and Pupil Support Workers may work with emotional distress that requires a skilled listening service and / or a defined programme of support – School Counsellors fit into the space between these services. Counsellors work with young people facing more entrenched mental health challenges that do not meet the criteria for CAMHS referrals. Counselling is not an ad hoc or one-off intervention during an emotional or behavioural crisis, but longer-term work based on building a trusting and meaningful relationship between the young person and the counsellor.

### **Who is counselling best for?**

For counselling to work the most important element is that the young person wants to work through the things that are worrying them. It is important that the child is not pressed to attend and that the referral happens with the young person's consent. Coming to the first session will give them the chance to decide whether they actively choose to continue working with the counsellor which is a vital part of the process.

Some examples of when counselling may be helpful for a young person:

- Feeling sad, unhappy, anxious or lonely
- Problems and arguments at home
- Feeling angry
- Parents splitting up
- Death of someone special
- Confused feelings about identity
- Wanting to hurt themselves or others
- Being bullied
- Suicidal thoughts
- Worrying about sex or relationships
- Having problems at school
- Issues with body image or weight
- Questions about sexuality or gender
- Issues with peer relationships and friends



- Relationship with food
- School and exams stress
- Traumatic events that have happened in the past
- Substance misuse
- Difficulties with attending school

### **When counselling may not be appropriate**

There are challenging life experiences we all go through where it is natural to experience difficult emotions. This does not always mean that a young person needs counselling, with some time and if a supportive family structure is in place, many will be able to work through difficulties on their own. At other times an alternative intervention to counselling is more appropriate in meeting a young person's needs.

Some examples of when counselling may not be appropriate include when the young person:

- does not wish to attend
- is attending CAMHS
- is accessing mental health support from another professional in the school
- is experiencing a one-off difficult day
- is experiencing the immediate aftermath of bereavement

### **Confidentiality and counselling**

The counselling relationship is between the young person and the counsellor and counselling is a time for the child or young person to talk about concerns without fear of them being discussed elsewhere, unless they have given their permission for the counsellor to do so. Therefore, it is important that the information discussed in the counselling sessions is treated confidentially. The only exception to this would be when the child or young person or someone around them are at risk of harm. In this case, with the knowledge of the child or young person, the school counsellor would contact the Child Protection Co-ordinator within the school and discuss the next steps. The limits of confidentiality are discussed with the child or young person in the initial session when contracting the working agreement. All counsellors adhere to Scottish Legislation and Aberdeenshire Council's policies, including child protection and data protection.

The school counsellor's role is to therapeutically support the child or young person, and they do not directly provide advocacy at Multi-Agency Action Planning meetings, Looked After Reviews or Child Protection Case Conferences. There may be very exceptional circumstances in which it is felt that input from the school counsellor would be crucial at a meeting and the counsellor would always discuss this with the young person first.

### **Who can come to school counselling?**

At the moment only Academy pupils can access school counselling. As the service grows, this will be opened up to primary school children aged 10 years and above. At a future point there will also be the opportunity for young people to self-refer for counselling.



If after the initial appointment, the counsellor feels that they are not best placed to provide the support the young person needs, they will discuss this with the young person and with the named person to access a more appropriate form of support.

If a young person has access to CAHMS, private counselling or other mental health support in school, they should not be referred to school counselling. However, counselling may still be considered if the young person is accessing other types of support services (e.g. substance misuse support).

### **What should I do if I think a young person could benefit from counselling?**

If you're unsure who may be best placed to support a young person going through a difficult time please speak to their named person in the first instance. This is usually the Head Teacher

/ Depute Head Teacher or Guidance Teacher. Referrals can now only be made through single or multi-agency action planning processes.

If the Team Around the Child agrees, then a trusted adult should discuss it with the young person before taking any further action. The *Aberdeenshire School Counselling Information for Young people leaflet* can be a helpful starting point when first talking to a child or young person about the service offered. Find out if *they* think it might be helpful for them. It is always a young person's choice whether to come to counselling and they should not be 'sent' to counselling for help or persuaded one way or another, even if school staff, parents/carers or other adults think they could benefit from talking to a counsellor.

If the young person wishes this option to be explored on their behalf, a referral may be submitted to the Local Management Group (LMG) via the Academy Depute Head Teacher (DHT) with responsibility for Pastoral Care. If it is deemed to be an appropriate referral by the LMG, the DHT Pastoral Care will share the referral information with the school counsellor, who will then arrange an initial meeting with the young person. At the initial meeting, the young person and the counsellor will jointly agree whether further counselling sessions should be arranged.

It is very important that you make it clear to the young person that just because a referral is going to be made, it does not necessary mean that they will be receiving school counselling support. Please let the young person know that they will hear back from you about whether the referral has been accepted within four weeks. Within four weeks, they will either be advised that an initial meeting with the counsellor will be set up for them, or that counselling is not available / appropriate at this time. If this is the case, alternative support will need to be sought by the Team Around the Child.

### **What if a young person wants to stop coming to counselling?**

Young people are free to end counselling at any time. During the first session they are advised of this and are asked to let the counsellor, counselling service or their Guidance Teacher know if this is the case.

The counsellor will advise the DHT Pastoral Care and named person (if different) that the counselling has come to an end.



**From mountain to sea**

**Is parental/carers consent needed?**

At the moment referrals can only be made through GIRFEC single or multi-agency action planning processes, of which parents are part. A self-referral system for young people over the age of 12 years will be explored at a future time.