

Academy Counselling Service Policy

St John's is proud to offer a counselling service for all students between Years 7 and 13. This is run by an experienced and qualified school counsellor who is available throughout term time to help manage the psychological well-being of all students at St John's.

Rona Muller, Academy Counsellor is available on a Wednesday and Thursday. As a member of the British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), our counsellor is bound by their Code of Ethics, and practice in accordance to their guidelines and principles. More information can be found at www.bacp.co.uk

What is counselling and how may it help?

- It can help us to understand our relationships better and improve them
- It can help us to increase our level of self-awareness
- It can help us to explore our feelings, and understand and manage them better
- It can help us to recognize unhelpful thought patterns and adopt new ones
- It can help us recognize the past and current behaviours which we do not want to take into the future
- It can help us to improve our communication skills
- It offers a place to reflect upon oneself and our relationship with the world

Young people clearly face many challenges whilst growing up and may find at times that they need someone to talk to external to either home or school. Counselling is a process which offers support and guidance when things feel particularly difficult. The counsellor will provide a safe and confidential place for a young person to explore thoughts and feelings which perhaps are overwhelming and upsetting, in a drive to enable change.

Issues young people may be struggling with include:

- Bullying
- Academic pressure
- Parental divorce or separation
- Peer pressure
- Drugs and/or alcohol
- Sexual health
- Arrival of new sibling
- Low mood
- Anxiety
- Exam stress
- Bereavement
- Confusion
- Anxiety about the future
- Self-harm

Referrals and Assessments

Students can make either make appointments directly with the counsellor, or alternatively they can speak to any member of staff who can make an appointment on their behalf. All referrals made a member of staff will have to provide a referral form for the counsellor before an appointment is made. *Please see attached form.* This can be accessed via the school website, or alternatively Student Service Managers; Ann Marr and Shona Young have access to paper copies. The referral acts as a primary link to understanding the issues that the young person is facing.

The young person may have needs that are not appropriate for counselling and require alternative intervention. These may be more complex needs such as youth offending, long term school absences, or psychiatric needs, all of which may require signposting to other agencies, either within or outside of school.

Once the referral has been made Rona will meet and assess the student. This process is important to identify the needs of the young person, and ensure that they have agreed to come along. **Counselling must be voluntary.** Students can be encouraged to attend, or a recommendation can be made, but ultimately young people have the choice.

The assessment also provides an opportunity for both student and counsellor to meet to decide on the best course of action.

Students can come for counselling for as long as is required which will often be discussed at the first session with the counsellor. This can vary between a one-off session in order to offload, or may lead to weekly sessions throughout the term. It is more common in schools that young people will attend for a maximum of six sessions.

Due to the nature of the counselling process, students are encouraged to come alone for their counselling, though will be seen alongside friends, or teachers as appropriate. Counselling involves an active drive to build family relationships so it may be that the counsellor will ask permission from the student to talk to a parent on the phone or will invite a parent in to meet with them and the young person to discuss how changes can be implemented.

Confidentiality

All young people are entitled to confidentiality as outlined by the BACP Code of Ethics. This means that the information they bring to the session will be held in confidence between themselves and the counsellor. **Information will not be shared** unless the young person has agreed to it.

The counsellor will however state that they may need to break confidentiality should they deem the young person at **significant risk** to themselves or others. At this point information may need to be shared with another party, either within school, or with an appropriate referral to an outside agency.

Counsellors are aware of Child Protection procedures and adhere to those as appropriate. The Designated Child Protection Officers are Alan Shelton, Maeve McNeill and Leslie Spencer.

Gillick Competence

“As a general principle it is legal and acceptable for a young person to ask for confidential counselling without parental consent providing they are of sufficient understanding and intelligence.” (Gillick v West Norfolk AHA, House of Lords 1985)

Since this ruling all young people are entitled to confidential counselling. *Gillick competence* will be assessed by the counsellor in the primary meeting with the young person and if deemed competent the young person will be able to give consent to counselling. Assessment of competence based on the Gillick principle depends on:

- The maturity of the young person
- The young person having sufficient intelligence and understanding of the consequences of his or her actions
- The young person having sufficient understanding and intelligence to enable them to understand what is being proposed, i.e. counseling.

As a rule most secondary students are deemed mature and intelligent enough to understand the counselling process, but there are occasionally those who are not. It is critical at this point that parental consent is obtained. Every effort is made to engage parents and where appropriate, young people are encouraged to inform their parents that they are receiving counselling.

We will provide signposting and guidance, as appropriate, to all staff.

For any further information about the counselling service, please contact Rona who would be happy to help.

Rona Muller,
Academy Counsellor

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rmuller@stjohns.excalibur.org.uk

Confidential School Counselling Referral Form

Name of referrer:

Date of referral:

Name of student:

Date of Birth:

Year and Tutor Group:

Is the student aware of this referral, and if yes, are they consenting to it?

Are the parents/main care givers aware of this referral?

Please provide a brief description of the problem/s, and the reason/s for a referral to counselling:

Please provide details of any intervention/s the school has already made to alleviate the problem/s the student faces:

List any other professional agencies involved in the care of this student (Social Services, Youth Offending Team etc.)

Does the student have any special needs?

Please return to Rona Muller (Academy Counsellor), G172, ext: 530