

Student Counselling Policy

1. The context and role of the counselling service in College

- 1.1 Bedford College is committed to supporting students and recognises the importance of a student's health and wellbeing in relation to his/her progression and wider College experience whilst ensuring the health, safety and wellbeing of others in the College community.. A student's mental health and wellbeing is very important to their success. It is recognised that the pressures on young people can affect their mental health and wellbeing, and that young people in education can experience high levels of stress and change, and be extremely vulnerable (BACP 2016).
- 1.2. Counselling is a form of psychological or talking therapy that offers people a chance to change how they feel and to live better.
- 1.3. The key task of the College is the education of its students, and implicit in this statement is the understanding that students work more effectively in a supportive environment which encourages personal development and autonomy. Students who feel in control of their personal lives are more likely to achieve educationally and contribute to the overall success of the College.
- 1.4. Students seek help from the counselling service for many reasons. These presenting issues may be having an effect on their wellbeing, or they may have noticed a distinct change in their behaviour and emotion at home, college or in their social lives. Examples of presenting issues are bereavement, anxiety, stress, personal and family relationships, personal and sexual identity, eating problems, self-harm, bullying and, anger management. Some students seek help due to unresolved issues from their childhood such as physical or sexual abuse, or neglect. Others seek help as they are having suicidal thoughts or have made a suicide attempt.
- 1.5. The counselling service provides students with support at a time when they are most vulnerable and aims to contain the distress of vulnerable students. However, the counselling service cannot take responsibility for all mental health issues arising in the College and will work together with other key staff to support students in distressing situations.
- 1.6. Counselling aims to help students, through individual or group work, to feel they are in control of their own lives, able to make choices and decisions, and to put them into action. It also allows the student to talk through past events and to come to a greater understanding of them. Counselling offers the opportunity for the student to talk and be heard in a safe, non-judgemental environment. The counsellor's role in this process is to facilitate the student's personal development in ways which respect their values and ability for self-purpose.
- 1.7 The counsellor will not usually give advice but will help the student find their own answers. Having said this, psycho-education is playing an increasingly bigger part in counselling, empowering students with knowledge around certain psychological theories and self-help interventions.
- 1.8. Counsellors may carry out other tasks including delivering workshops to students and staff on topics including anti-bullying, self-esteem, relaxation or anger management.

The counselling team also offer group mediation to students and staff to enable parties to find a resolution to a conflict.

Counsellors are also available to advise and support teaching or Student Services staff whose students are experiencing difficult situations, or to help them understand certain behaviours. These could include consultations on the sudden death of a student, suicide, self-harm, depression or anxiety attacks.

- 1.9 Counsellors also liaise with external agencies and maintain links with these to support the wellbeing of students. These may include GPs, local counselling services and community mental health teams.

2. Entitlement to counselling

- 2.1. The Counselling Service is available to all students of Bedford College. However, in order to maintain professional and ethical boundaries, students who also work at the College, including as an apprentice, should access the Workforce Wellness EAP programme for counselling.
- 2.2. The Service is not available to students on counselling courses who are seeking a specific number of hours of personal therapy for assessment purposes only. However, students on those courses who are in need of counselling support are entitled to the same level of service as all other students.
- 2.3. The Counselling Service operates during term-time. Students seeking counselling during the College vacations or evenings are referred to appropriate external agencies.

3. Professional practice and standards

- 3.1. All counsellors are required to have a minimum qualification of a Level 4 Diploma in Counselling and are committed to maintaining their competence through on-going professional development. Counsellors are required to be a member of a professional body such as The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.
- 3.2. To fulfil the requirements of the Ethical Framework of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (2016) counsellors must participate in continuous professional development, which may include attendance at training courses, workshops, conference or professional networking. CPD must include a range of activities relevant to working with young people.
- 3.3. To ensure safe practice there is designated time for the review of clinical work. Counsellors monitor and develop their work through regular supervision with an appropriately trained professional. Counsellors are required to have a minimum of 1.5 hours a month.
- 3.4. Students are entitled to expect a high quality therapeutic counselling service which:
 - is client-focused
 - is delivered by appropriately qualified counsellors
 - abides by the BACP Ethical Framework and Bedford College policies and procedures.
- 3.5. The service may provide opportunities for trainee counsellors to work with students. Trainees are mentored by a College counsellor to ensure they are supported in their roles, as well as having external professional supervision. Clients have an initial

assessment with a College counsellor to identify their needs and goals. At this point, prior to counselling commencing, they may be offered counselling with a trainee counsellor if appropriate. Clients may decline this offer, in which case they will have counselling with a fully trained counsellor.

4. Confidentiality

- 4.1. Generally, young people aged 16-18 have the same entitlement to confidentiality as adults. This means they should be informed of the terms of the counselling contract and the limitations of confidentiality, and agree to these before therapy begins.
- 4.2. The BACP Ethical Framework (2016) requires that counsellors offer the highest possible levels of confidentiality in order to respect the client's privacy and create the trust necessary for counselling.
- 4.3. Counselling sessions are confidential to the student. Unless they have the student's prior consent, the counsellor will not pass on to a third party any information regarding a student's attendance, their presenting issues or their ongoing issues.
- 4.4. However, in exceptional circumstances the counsellor may take the decision to break confidentiality, with or without the student's consent, if necessary where in his/her professional judgement:
 - there is a risk of the student seriously harming themselves or being harmed
 - there is a risk of another person being harmed
 - there is a risk of a serious crime being committed.
- 4.5. In the above circumstances, a risk assessment is completed and if a high risk is assessed, the counsellor refers to a designated safeguarding member of staff. Counsellors will always seek to obtain the student's specific consent in writing, prior to disclosure.
- 4.6. All College counsellors are trained in safeguarding. When responding to an allegation of abuse, or when suspecting a child or vulnerable adult is or has been suffering significant harm or showing signs of extremism, counsellors abide by the College's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.
- 4.7. For ethical and legal reasons, counsellors cannot offer absolute confidentiality to their clients. The confidentiality policy is explained to the client in their initial contracting session when the client is asked to sign the confidentiality agreement before any disclosures are made.

5. Service delivery

5.1 The Counselling Service offers the following:

- One-to-one therapeutic counselling by appointment
- Daily drop-in sessions for students wanting to see a counsellor at short notice and for a short time
- Mediation between students
- Consultations with teaching and support staff to support them in their roles
- Workshops for students on various topics such as anger management, self-esteem and relaxation.
- support with implementation or advice on the Fitness to Study policy.

- Email support to staff and students

5.2. Counselling is provided in a safe and confidential environment.

6. Referring into the service

- 6.1 Students can self-refer or may be referred by teaching or support staff.
- 6.2 Students can be referred directly to the service, by text, telephone, email or through the Student Services help-desk. Staff with access to the counselling calendar can book students directly into a 20 minute drop-in slot.
- 6.3 Initial appointments with the Counsellor are carried out within the drop-in time with a 20 minutes initial assessment. Within this assessment, risk is assessed as well as suitability for counselling. Following the initial assessment, an appointment will be offered to the student. In cases where there is no availability of appointments, the student will go onto a waiting list to see the next available counsellor. If it is felt that the student would benefit from accessing different therapies offered at the College through Early Help or CAMHS, this will be discussed with the student.
- 6.4 The counselling service initially offers six sessions that can be extended to 12. If a student still requires further support they will be able to re-refer themselves back into the service and be added to the waiting list or they will be referred to an external service which may be able to meet their need.
- If a student is assessed as high risk (for example, suicidal) then they will go on a separate 'urgent' list and seen as high priority. The Counselling service offers limited urgent slots where the designated safeguarding team are able to book students into
- 6.5. Counselling sessions are up to 50 minutes and students normally attend on a weekly basis though the frequency of the sessions may reduce where a student is coming to the end of their support
- 6.6. Students will arrange their sessions outside of class times. If attendance during class time is unavoidable, they must seek permission from their tutor in order to attend
- 6.7. Counsellors develop and maintain an effective network of internal and external referral agencies and refer students as appropriate and where in their best interest.
- 6.8. Counsellors develop and maintain a bank of resources on counselling- related topics for use by the Student Services staff and by students on a self-help basis. These are available in Student Services and online
- 6.9 Counsellor safety is important and in order to ensure the counsellors are safe, each room is supplied with a personal alarm.

It is advised that counsellors position their seating with clear access to the door.

Communication with students outside of the session is carried out via Txttools, an electronic messaging service or via the counselling email address. Communication is to be kept within college hours and term time only as per Professional Boundaries Policy.

7. Working with a third party present

- 7.1 The college works with a diverse range of students, all with differing needs. The counselling team can work with students who require:-
- A British Sign Language interpreter
 - A language interpreter
- 7.2 Counsellors are required to ensure the interpreter is a member of a professional body with a code of practice which has a clear confidentiality policy.
- 7.3 Counsellors can offer de-briefing sessions for the third party particularly where sensitive information has been shared.

8. Record-keeping

- 8.1. Confidentiality of all information kept about a client is of paramount importance. All counselling records and case notes are kept securely in locked drawers in the counselling room or within student services (Shuttleworth & The Bedford Sixth Form).
- 8.2. Client statistical data is stored electronically on the Student Services database. The database is secure and password protected. Access to counselling information is restricted to counsellors, Student Wellbeing Manager and the Director of Student Services. The Student Services Administrator also has access to information for reporting purposes.
- 8.3. Statistical information is used to monitor the service and to improve it. No individual student is singled out or identified from this data.
- 8.4. The purpose of record-keeping is explained to all students using the counselling service. The student's consent to collect and record information is obtained in line with data protection legislation. Students have a right of access to all records/notes the service holds about them.
- 8.5. Records are destroyed three academic years after the year in which their counselling commenced. Records are disposed of safely and securely.

9. Marketing strategy

- 9.1. The counselling service is promoted to students and staff via:
- Induction talks
 - Freshers' Fair
 - Student Services publicity materials and posters
 - Student handbooks
 - Staff intranet
 - Virtual learning environment (Moodle) and Yourspaceonline
 - Tutorial programmes
 - Health Awareness and Stay Safe weeks
 - Mental Health self-help leaflets
- 9.2. Counsellors attend staff meetings within teaching centres and contribute to the staff development programme, to ensure teaching staff understand how counselling can help them and their students.

10. Monitoring and evaluation

10.1 The counselling service is evaluated annually as part of the College's self-assessment process, in line with the Ofsted common inspection framework and the Matrix standard, and draws on:

- statistical data collected monthly on levels of service take-up
- anonymised client data reflecting the profile of service users and presenting issues
- a review form used at the start and end of the counselling process to monitor distance travelled by the student during their counselling
- evaluation forms given to clients to complete anonymously at the end of their counselling
- information on levels of awareness of the service collected through cross-College surveys and focus groups.

11. Complaints procedure

11.1 A student may make a complaint about a counsellor by following the grievance procedure for students which is set out in the student handbook and is available on the College website. A student may also register a complaint online via the 'Have Your Say' section of Moodle.

11.2 A grievance against a counselling member of staff is referred to the Director of Quality who will investigate the matter fully and decide an outcome.

11.3 If a student is still unhappy about the outcome of the complaint, a student may contact the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) who will start a professional conduct procedure. A copy of this procedure is available in the BACP Ethical Framework. The professional conduct procedure may only be activated after all local procedures have been implemented.

12. Supporting policies and procedures

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethical Framework 2016
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Prevent Strategy and Guidelines
- Substance Misuse Policy
- Confidentiality Policy
- Complaints policy
- Grievance Procedure for Students