

COUNSELLING POLICY

Mission Statement

We will be uncompromisingly focused on ensuring every individual is successful.

1. **Excellence** – We will provide students with opportunities in which to excel, to empower them to make free choices as a foundation for the best possible future; with outcomes in line with or better than their peers nationally.
2. **Equality** – We will provide high quality teaching and learning, delivering a broad, knowledge rich curriculum, where high aspirations are the norm and success is celebrated, to all students regardless of their background, ethnicity, religion, gender, educational need.
3. **Truth** – We will pursue truth open-mindedly, seeking to help students to enquire, question and challenge, helping them to be well-rounded, resilient, confident, independent learners with a love for learning.
4. **Respect** – We will create a safe community that has at its core an understanding of deep respect for self, for others and for the environment; strong relationships are key.

Executive Head teacher: Jen Veal
Assistant Head teacher (Culture): Dan Vile
SDCC & the Atrium e-reviewed this policy: March 2022 This policy will be formally reviewed annually.

South Dartmoor Community College & the Atrium

OUR VISION

The core guiding principle that lies at the heart of South Dartmoor and Atrium is to encourage and develop personal responsibility among all members of our community.

The counselling service aims to support this vision by providing a therapeutic space where students can explore their situations, feelings and relationships and through this increased awareness and enhanced emotional intelligence, be empowered to make necessary changes. It also provides a safe space to receive support through life's challenges.

INTRODUCTION

As part of the supportive framework at South Dartmoor and Atrium, students have the opportunity to access a counselling service within the school.

WHAT IS COUNSELLING?

It is a process by which clients/students can share their thoughts, feelings and issues (that they may find difficult to share with family and friend) with a trained professional within a safe and confidential space, with an aim to increase their awareness and coping strategies.

WHO ARE THE COUNSELLORS?

There are currently two fully qualified female integrative counsellors who are individually insured and DBS checked. The service consists Catharine Edwards and Maxine Stevens, both of whom have worked with the schools for several years. They work in tandem with the Pastoral team to offer a confidential safe space where emotions can be explored and coping strategies can be highlighted. Each of the school counsellors has a wealth of experience in working with young people, and all are members of either The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy (**BACP**) or the National Counselling Society (**NCS**) and are therefore bound by their code of ethics. https://www.bacp.co.uk/ethical_framework/

HOW DOES THE SERVICE WORK?

There is a waiting list and appointments can be requested via teaching staff and are allocated in response to the level of need/risk. Referrals are rated on the forms as either:

3. Urgent.
2. Could potentially escalate.
1. Non-urgent.

In connection with the practice guidance of the Threshold tool set out by the Devon Safeguarding Children Board.

Early assessments ideally take place as close to referral as possible by the counsellor to identify priority cases, and link in with alternative early help where available.

Students can also self-refer at the student reception by placing a request slip in the box.

It is important to note, counselling is not a quick fix, and it can take time to acknowledge and understand issues which arise and to facilitate change. Sometimes due to the nature of the process, things can get worse before it gets better. So if a student is undergoing counselling, they will need as much support as possible from those close to them. Where possible we encourage students to build on their support network both within and outside of the college setting.

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WELL BEING AND RESILIENCE

The student's wellbeing alongside the process will be monitored in conjunction with staff. Students may need time to settle and understanding from staff particularly immediately following a session. If deemed necessary by the counsellor a student a note/email/phone-call can be made to increase awareness of this for staff for the remainder of their school day. For those who come into contact with students having counselling, mindfulness of sensitivities around the process and its impact would be beneficial for those involved.

Self-reflection and resilience of the student is encouraged to help empower to thrive and find the best ways through some of life's difficulties.

The counsellors tailor the work to suit the student's individual needs. They use a variety of therapeutic techniques including CBT, Mindfulness and Creative/Art/Play Therapy.

REASONS FOR COMING TO COUNSELLING

Students come to counselling to look at loss, anger, anxiety, self-harm, low mood, low self-esteem, and trauma.

Following a written referral, a verbal contract between counsellor and student is made within the first session to encourage the student to commit to the process.

EVALUATION/OUTCOMES

To provide evidence-based treatment our service also utilises evaluation forms at the start, middle and end of our work to assess and clarify need, ascertain whereabouts the student is on their therapeutic process and to acknowledge change.

Some students may need a couple of sessions, others may require signposting to alternative support, and some may need longer. Up to date resources such as Childline, Kooth.com, worksheets, will be offered to help build the student's toolkit for self-help.

AUTONOMY

It is not acceptable to refer to counselling against a student's wishes as it is needs to be a partly autonomous decision. Students have the right to refuse/discontinue counselling at any time, but a safe ending would be sought where possible.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND DIVERSITY

The service incorporates access for students of any gender, disability, race and sexual orientation with no discrimination.

COMPETENCY FOR COUNSELLING/CONSENT

Where a student is deemed not Gillick/Fraser competent (i.e. they are unable to engage in/understand the process and nature of counselling) they may be declined the service. Again alternative support would then be sought.

ENDINGS

Counsellors have the right to refuse/terminate the counselling process with a student at any point if there is a clash of interests. They will endeavour to discuss any changes with the student and staff member to ensure adequate follow-on support is in place if needed.

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CONFIDENTIALITY AND SAFEGUARDING

Confidentiality is key to the counselling process. Whilst many students are referred to the service by parents, students have the right to undertake counselling without parent's awareness or consent.

Counsellors hold confidentiality unless they feel that the student or another person is at serious risk. They are not legally, but ethically obliged to pass on information if it is in the best interest of the student/to protect the safety of others. This is in adherence to the Department of Education's Keeping Children Safe in Education, Sept 2021, and the school's safeguarding guidelines.

Counsellors would if at all possible, seek the student's permission to disclose information shared in session. Further help would be sought in order to find the best solution for the student. The counsellor would try to give the student choice, and have their options clearly defined. If confidentiality is broken, there is often a consultation period when the level of risk is assessed via the safeguarding lead/appropriate Performance Leader and in supervision.

If the risk is immediate, action will be taken as quickly as possible to inform the appropriate and present member of staff within the school/and or parent to minimise risk.

CATEGORIES RESULTING IN DISCLOSURE

1. If the student is **severely self-harming or at risk of suicide**, or if the mental/physical wellbeing of a person is putting them or another in danger (or it is being compromised by a third party). If appropriate the student's parent/teacher/CAMHS/GP will be informed.
2. If there is **neglect, emotional, physical or sexual abuse** of a student (18 years old and under). This category includes sexting, exploitation and radicalisation.
3. If there is evidence of **bullying** (online or in person).
4. If the person is at serious risk due to **weapons**.
5. If seriously **abusing or selling illegal substances or involved in illegal activity**.

REFERRAL PROTOCOL/MULTI-AGENCY APPROACH

The key staff member (who the counsellor/student has disclosed to) according to the school's safeguarding policy, will decide if/when to inform the parent/guardian and/or appropriate services including GP, Social Worker/YSMART/CAMHS/School nurse. Where information is shared this should be treated as confidential. Staff are required to respect the rights of students to confidentiality (amongst staff and other students) and must not share information if the student has requested not to do so (unless it has been agreed with the student).

NOTES

Counselling notes are kept by each individual counsellor and are not part of college property (they are stored securely by the counsellor), and are private and confidential (but may be referred to within supervision). They will only be shown if legally subpoenaed. In accordance with Data Protection protocols, students are not named in the notes.

REVIEW OF SERVICE/SUPERVISION

The service will be regularly reviewed and updated when needed in accordance with Departmental advice and under the guidance of adequate supervision by an approved supervisor. Each counsellor is responsible for ensuring they have a minimum of 1/1.5 hours per month depending on their hours and term holidays.

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COMPLAINTS PROCEDURE

If a student, parent or member of staff needs to make a complaint about the counselling service, the steps would be as follows:

Informal

1. Initially contact directly the counsellor involved by phone message via the main school switchboard/email care of hjessop@southdartmoor.devon.sch.uk

(Vexatious complaints will not be considered.)

Formal

2. If the situation is still unresolved, contact the Head of Year of the student or a member of the pastoral team/student support and put the complaint in writing.
3. If it remains unresolved contact Dan Vile via email dvile@southdartmoor.devon.sch.uk who will then respond within 48 hours during the working week in term time.
4. Lastly, if the situation needs further exploration the counsellor's individual professional body, either the BACP or NCS could be contacted.

NB - An anonymous concern or complaint will not be investigated under this procedure, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

To enable a proper investigation, complaints should be brought to the attention of the school as soon as possible. In general, any matter raised more than 3 months after the event will not be considered.