

Student counselling policy at Essa Academy

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Counselling Policy – At Essa Academy

The counselling service is independent, confidential and child/young person centered. Independence is an important aspect of this service, particularly when dealing with those students who may feel alienated from the Academy. This does not prevent the service from being seen as a supportive part of the Academy community

Successful counselling is based on trust, self-motivation and commitment. It must be a voluntary activity and is therefore not part of the disciplinary procedures of the Academy.

Additionally counselling can be used as an intervention to support the needs of a child with mental health issues. Referrals are made internally by staff with the support of parents/carers or students can self refer.

Why do we need a Counsellor at the Academy?

- Counselling is a way of helping our students, teachers and parents through a process of talking, listening and empowerment. The client is provided with a safe place to express their feelings and thoughts about what they perceive to be an issue in their life. Counselling can help a person to understand themselves and their situation better. It can give them new ways of coping with issues that cause them upset, and for our students this will result in increased capacity for learning.
- When children are experiencing difficulties at home or in the Academy their concentration and the way they behave can be adversely affected.
- An Academy based service brings counselling to children and young people in a place that is familiar, safe and secure. By providing emotional support and enabling children to 'off load' feelings and anxieties, counselling can help a student to concentrate more in class, feel better about themselves and build their self-confidence

What is counselling and how may it help?

Counselling is a process, which offers support and guidance when things feel particularly difficult. Children and young people face many challenges whilst growing up, and may find at times that they need someone to talk to external to home. Accessing counselling at the Academy can benefit them with professional support. An experienced member of staff can support children and young people and identify areas that the individual need support. These could be areas such as developmental issues, helping resolving problems, improving relationships, making choices, coping with changes, gaining an insight and understanding and supporting this individual to grow as a person.

Counselling can:

- Help us to understand our relationships better and improve them

- Help us to increase our level of self awareness
- Help us to explore our feelings, and understand and manage them better
- Help us to recognise unhelpful thought patterns and adopt new ones.
- Help us to improve our communication skills
- Offer a place to talk openly, without being judged

Issues children and young people may be struggling with include:

- Bullying
- Academic pressure
- Peer pressure
- Drugs and/or alcohol
- Family relationships
- Anxiety and depression
- Confusion
- Loss and grief
- Confusion
- Self harm
- Eating disorders
- Body image

It is equally important to remember that, as adults, we sometimes need support at difficult times in our lives. There are challenges directly associated with work and home life. Staff at Essa Academy can also seek advice and support from the Academy's mental health lead/counsellor.

Pupil referral

Staff or parents may consider referring a student to, or advising a student to see, the counsellor if the young person is:

- Becoming very subdued or over excited; has marked mood swings, or is exhibiting behaviour that is 'out of character'
- Refusing to attend the Academy
- Found bullying other children
- Being bullied
- Having difficulties due to a family breakdown or parents separating
- Having peer group difficulties/relationships
- Finding it hard to cope following the death of a family member/close friend
- Self-harming e.g. cutting
- Experiencing low self esteem
- Finding it hard to concentrate in lessons and the standard of their work has dropped dramatically
- Not being seen to drink any fluids or eat any food

This list is not exclusive and the counsellor will be able to offer advice about the suitability of all referrals.

Referral process:

- Students will be informed using leaflets, posters placed around the academy and by their teachers how they can access the Counselling Service for themselves

- Referrals may also be made by the parents or by staff. Staff wishing to refer a student must in the first instance discuss this with the young person involved. All referrals made by a member of staff will have to provide a referral form for the counsellor before an appointment is made. The referral form can be found within the reprographics room or provided by the mental health lead or counsellor.
- Once the referral has been made, subject to parental permission (where applicable), the Counsellor will meet and assess the student.

Confidentiality

Why is confidentiality important?

Confidentiality is essential to the formal counselling process:

- To enable the young person to develop a trusting relationship with the counsellor.
- To allow the young person to open up and share feelings without fear of blame or reprisal.
- To allow the young person to speak freely about issues concerning them.
- To encourage others to come forward for counselling.

Problems in maintaining confidentiality are unlikely to occur if there is mutual trust, goodwill and respect between counsellor, Academy, staff and parents.

How does confidentiality work?

- The young person is free to talk to anyone about their counselling sessions if they wish, but should not be directly questioned by staff
- The counsellor will not pass on any detailed accounts of sessions, but may communicate periodically with the Academy's pastoral team about general progress, with the child's permission
- It would be reasonable to expect the counsellor to record issues raised by children and young people on CPOMS, in order to inform school development and policy including safeguarding.
- For the young person to feel supported between counselling sessions, they may wish a trusted member of staff to know they are receiving counselling

What limitations are there to confidentiality?

The Principal has the right to make decisions about sharing information and confidentiality. This will be done in a reasonable way and in the best interest of the child.

Breaching confidentiality

- At the outset, the counsellor will make it clear to the young person that they may need to breach confidentiality (i.e. tell someone and seek help). This may happen when the young person or any other person (adult or child) is at risk of significant harm.
- The counsellor will discuss this with the young person again if the need arises and try to gain their consent to disclosing concerns. Where possible, the counsellor will keep them informed and involve them in this process.
- Even without the child's consent, it may be necessary to disclose information they have revealed.

- In the case of a young person threatening suicide or serious self-harm, there is a general acceptance of the need for intervention even when this involves breaking confidentiality.
- More minor concerns will remain confidential unless the young person wants them shared to seek further help.
- Good practice involves working in partnership with parents.

When is parental consent needed?

- According to Lord Scarman in the case *Gillick v West Norfolk AHA*, a child under 16 may consent to treatment on their own behalf only if, and when, they achieve sufficient maturity and intelligence to understand fully what is proposed and the potential consequences
- It is generally understood that children of Primary School age are unlikely to be “Gillick competent”. (see Appendix 1)
- Based on this, staff wishing to refer a primary school aged child to the counsellor will need to gain the parents’ permission first. Any parents of Primary School aged children are deemed to have the right to refuse their child access to the Counselling Service
- For parents of ‘Gillick competent’ children (in most cases this will be Year 7 and upwards), parental permission to seek counselling will not be required but would be preferred. Secondary School students will be offered one or two initial exploratory sessions with the counsellor to outline what is involved, to allow the counsellor and the Academy to assess their “competence” before they commit themselves and to encourage the young person to agree to their parents being approached for them to have on going counselling were parents of ‘Gillick competent’ children withhold consent or the young person may be very distressed and unwilling for the Academy to approach the parents, counselling can go ahead if the counsellor assesses the young person as Gillick competent to consent in their own right.

Child Protection

The Academy has a child protection policy. The policy sets out the procedures to be used when there is a disclosure about child abuse concerns or an allegation against a member of staff. This policy also applies to the academies counsellor in the event of a disclosure of abuse during a counselling session the counsellor will follow the procedures as stated in the Child Protection Policy. The Counsellor will work closely with the Designated Senior Person in supporting the child/young person concerned.

Monitoring and Evaluation of the Service

Monitoring of the counselling service provision will take place on an on going basis to evaluate performance, identify areas of concern and inform service development.

Data will be collated that includes:

- Numbers of young people attending.
- Gender of young people attending.
- Number of sessions per young person.
- Numbers who did not keep counselling appointment.

- Range of issues arising e.g. family conflict, self harm, bullying
- Safeguarding issues arising e.g. Domestic violence, sexual, physical, emotional abuse, neglect
- Action resulting from safeguarding concerns
- Ethnicity of young people accessing counselling
- Disability, illness, special needs
- Immediate impact of counselling for the young person
- Evaluation will take place using a variety of methods including: user friendly forms; focus groups and; peer evaluation

Appendix 1

How to measure 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)

Assessment of competence based on the Gillick principle depends on:

The maturity of the young person

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

The counsellor, with the link member of staff for counselling or head teacher, should make this assessment.

“.... In cases where the child is not Gillick competent and parental consent is not forthcoming, schools should continue efforts to engage the parents (e.g. offering an opportunity to meet the Counsellor)