

BEDFORD COLLEGE

Student Counselling Policy

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

- 1.1. It is the stated aim of Bedford College to create a healthy and safe environment for its students and staff. The College has been awarded Healthy College recognition, and is committed to achieving the Ofsted outcomes for learners which include a requirement for them to be healthy, stay safe and enjoy and achieve at college. A student's mental health and wellbeing are 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 2010).
- 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 can not 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. The counsellor will not usually give advice but will help the student find their own answers.
- 1.7. Counsellors may carry out other tasks including delivering workshops to students and staff on topics including anti-bullying, self esteem, relaxation or anger management. 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.
- 1.8. 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 are referred to appropriate external agencies.

3. Professional practice and standards

- 3.1. All counsellors are trained to diploma level and are committed to maintaining their competence through on-going professional development.
- 3.2. To fulfil the requirements of the Ethical Framework of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (2010) counsellors must participate in continuous professional development, which may include attendance at training courses, workshops, conference or professional networking.
- 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 have supervision of up to one and a half hours per 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 (2010) 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, counsellors abide by the College Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.
- 4.7. Therefore, 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. Record-keeping

- 5.1. 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. Students' contact details are kept separately, in a different locked drawer to their case notes.
- 5.2. Client statistical data is stored electronically. The database is secure and password protected. Access to counselling information is restricted to counsellors, the Student Wellbeing Manager and the Director of Student Services.
- 5.3. Statistical information is used to monitor the service and to improve it. No individual student is singled out or identified from this data.

- 5.4. 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.
- 5.5. Records are kept no longer than is necessary. Records are destroyed three academic years after the year in which their counselling commenced. Records are disposed of safely and securely.

6. Service delivery

- 6.1. 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 anti-bullying - 'Respect', anger management, self-esteem and relaxation.
- 6.2. Counselling is provided in a safe and confidential environment.
- 6.3. Students can self-refer or may be referred by teaching or support staff.
- 6.4. Appointments can be booked directly with the counsellor in person, by text, telephone, email or through the Student Services help-desk.
- 6.5. Counselling sessions normally last up to 50 minutes and students normally attend on a weekly basis.
- 6.6. Short-term or long-term counselling is available, according to the student's needs.
- 6.7. Wherever possible, students will arrange their sessions outside of class times. If attendance during class time is unavoidable, they must seek permission from their tutor.

- 6.8. Counsellors develop and maintain an effective network of internal and external referral agencies and refer students as appropriate and where in their best interest.
- 6.9. 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.

7. Marketing strategy

7.1. The counselling service is advertised to students and staff via:

- Induction talks
- Freshers' Fair
- Student Services publicity materials and posters
- Student handbooks
- Staff intranet
- Virtual learning environment (Moodle)
- Tutorial programmes
- Health Awareness and Stay Safe weeks

7.2. Counsellors attend staff meetings within teaching centres and contribute to the staff development programme for personal tutors, to ensure teaching staff understand how counselling can help them and their students.

8. Monitoring and evaluation

8.1 The counselling service is evaluated annually as part of the College's self assessment process, in line with the Ofsted common inspection framework, and 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.

9. Complaints procedure

- 9.1. 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
- 9.2. A student may also register a complaint online via the 'Have Your Say' section of Moodle.
- 9.3. 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.
- 9.4. Students who are not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint investigation may appeal and details of how to do this and the relevant timescales are set out in the decision letter.
- 9.5. If still dissatisfied 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.

10. Supporting policies and procedures

10.1. This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy Ethical Framework 2010
- Bedford College Safeguarding Policy
- Bedford College Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Bedford College Confidentiality Policy
- Bedford College Single Equality Scheme
- Bedford College Compliments, Complaints, Suggestions & Complaints policy
- Bedford College Grievance Procedure for Students
- Student Services Feedback Strategy

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