

Counselling Service Policy

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Policy Statement

Bird College acknowledges that mental health is key to our students' overall wellbeing. How students think and feel about themselves, others, and their environment will have an impact on their behaviour and their ability to cope with difficult times. It is the aim of the counselling service to ensure that students are given support when needed to overcome emotional and personal difficulties and maximise the benefits from their participation on their chosen course of study. Thus, the key responsibility of the college is the education of its students, and implicit in this statement is the understanding that students will work more effectively in a supportive and safe environment which encourages personal development and artistic growth.

The Counselling Service is committed to upholding the principles of equality, diversity, equity, and inclusion in all its practices. We strive to provide an inclusive environment that respects and values the diverse backgrounds and needs of all students.

The counselling service provides students with the help and support at a time when they are feeling most vulnerable. However, the counselling service cannot take responsibility for all mental health issues arising in the college and therefore will work together with other external agencies to support students who are considered to be at risk of significant harm.

What is counselling?

Counselling is a type of therapy which gives the client an opportunity to explore life events, feelings, emotions, relationships, ways of thinking, and analyse patterns of behaviour that might be causing distress. It is a confidential service and confidentiality is only broken if there is fear of significant harm to the client or others. It also helps to increase one's self-awareness, identify personal issues, as well as develop coping strategies by exploring these in a safe environment away from everyday life.

Counselling is different from mentoring or coaching and is not about giving advice or opinions, nor is it a friendly chat with a friend. The therapist helps and challenges the client to understand themselves better and find their own solutions to resolve or manage their situation.

Role of the Counsellor

The counsellor can enable the client to focus on their concerns, provide a platform to explore specific problems, make choices, manage crises, work through feelings, and improve relationships with others as well as with oneself. Counsellors do this by being a trained listener and observer of human behaviour who can then present these observations back in a constructive way.

The counsellor can offer a safe supportive and confidential environment to talk about difficult issues in confidence and will listen to one's views, experiences and feelings without judgement and in an atmosphere of respect and empathy based on a secure and trusting working relationship.

The role of the counsellor is:

- To undertake one to one counselling sessions

- To agree on a counselling contract, including confidentiality and cancellation policies and safe keeping of records
- To establish a relationship of trust and respect, and actively listen to client's concerns in a non-judgemental way
- To help clients reach a deeper understanding about themselves and suggest strategies which could help them deal with their personal issues whilst engaging in full-time education
- To be aware of cultural competence, LGBTQ+ issues and support for students with disabilities and neurodivergent conditions.
- To liaise, as necessary, with other agencies and staff to help make changes based on the issues raised. This is done with the consent of the client.
- To refer clients to external agencies when appropriate and liaise with the Safeguarding Lead
- To maintain appropriate records and contribute to the Student Wellbeing Report for the BOD
- To analyse patterns and trends and advise the College Executive Team accordingly
- To work collaboratively with staff and senior managers in the promotion of students' mental health
- To work with the College Community as a whole to support wellbeing and good mental health

Resources

The college will provide:

- An appropriate room which is safe, private and can be discreetly accessed by all clients
- A system for storing data and records anonymously, appropriately and registered with the ICO)
- Use of a desk and IT equipment

Referral Process

Referrals for counselling are ideally self-referrals, although other students or members of staff can signpost the service. The referral service considers equity by providing additional support to students who might face systemic barriers in accessing mental health services, are neurodivergent, and/or have a mental health condition.

- Self-referral by email to: counselling@birdcollege.co.uk

Accessing the Service

All students enquiring about accessing the service are asked to fill out a Counselling Referral Form. The form asks for a basic outline of what the problem is and a short history of any previous mental health issues. The student is expected to have registered with a local GP as the GP details are required should there be need for any referral to an outside agency or need for possible medication. Once the referral form has been received by the service, the student is added to the counselling service waiting list and will be offered sessions as soon as space becomes available. Efforts will be made to prioritise urgent cases, and in particular students of safeguarding concern, where there will be liaison between the counsellor and the Safeguarding Lead. Students are offered six counselling sessions, once a week for approximately 50 minutes a session, a contract is issued to the students detailing the terms and conditions of the counselling service. Once the students have agreed to the contract, counselling will proceed.

Once a client has had 6 sessions with the counsellor, a review will take place in order to ascertain the needs of the client, including the possibility to refer to external services. However, some clients may feel they do not need all 6 sessions, and there may be mutual consent with the counsellor to end. Clients can cancel sessions with good warning and an appropriate reason, however if a client fails to attend two consecutive sessions, the client will be discharged immediately so that other students can access the service.

Discharged students are able to refer themselves again to the service at any point during their time at the college.

Any disclosures that relate to imminent harm to self, for example, through self-harm, suicidal thoughts, expressed intent or attempt(s), must be passed on to the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) and the client's General Practitioner as soon as possible. The parents of the client, if appropriate, might also be contacted on these occasions.

Waiting List

The Counsellors will operate a waiting list for clients wishing to access the counselling service. Each client not seen immediately will be informed that they have been placed on the waiting list and offered an indication of when they may receive an appointment with the counsellor. It is the intention of the counselling service that clients will be seen within six weeks of completing their counselling referral form.

The Counsellors will endeavour to establish the urgency of the referral and if it is considered high priority, to work in conjunction with the Assistant Principal in enabling the client to access counselling as soon as possible.

Students will also be sent a contact list of external agencies they can access for counselling and for out of hour's emergencies.

Discharge

In preparation for discharge, the counsellor will discuss any ongoing needs of the client and make (or enable the client to make) appropriate arrangements or referrals. Where the client and/or counsellor feels that the sessions are no longer needed, one final session will be offered, and the client discharged.

The counsellors will inform the DSL when clients with safeguarding concerns have been discharged.

Record Keeping and GDPR

The counsellors will keep factual notes of appointments dates, number of sessions and topics discussed, and process notes which support the work. These will be stored securely and for the sole use of the student counsellor and the DSL when safeguarding concerns are involved. Both are coded as not to identify the client and stored in a secure place.

Factual and process notes will be kept whilst the client is studying at college; these notes will be destroyed once the client graduates.

All written safeguarding records will be kept by the Designated Safeguarding Lead in secure conditions for a period of at least 25 years.

Supporting policies and procedures:

- The Safeguarding Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Whistle-Blowing Policy
- Safer Recruitment Policy
- Low BMI and Disordered Eating Guidelines
- Preventing Extremism and Radicalisation Policy

Safeguarding

While the Designated Safeguarding Lead may have a general overview of the presenting reason for referral, the content of sessions will remain confidential unless the welfare and safety of the client and/or another is considered to be at risk of significant harm. In these instances, the safeguarding policy will be activated, and a safeguarding form will be completed by the counsellor and passed to the DSL and other appropriate external agencies.

The counsellor will not pass on any detailed accounts of sessions but may communicate periodically with College staff about general progress with the client's agreement. College staff should understand the client's right to confidentiality in counselling and will respect this in their dealings with the counsellor and the client.

Confidentiality

Good practice dictates that at the beginning of a counselling relationship the client and the counsellor enter into a contract. This clearly sets out what boundaries exist in the context of the College based counselling service, the clients' and the counsellor's expectations, and the procedures that the client and the college must adhere to.

Please note that clients will not be offered levels of confidentiality that cannot be kept. Absolute confidentiality therefore cannot be guaranteed, though the welfare of the client will, at all times, take precedence over confidentiality. At the beginning of a counselling relationship, the counsellor will explain confidentiality and its limitations to the client. Two of these limitations would include:

1. When a young person is at risk of significant harm to self or others
2. When the counsellor presents their cases anonymously in clinical supervision

All counsellors are expected to discuss difficult ethical and moral decisions of reporting disclosures with their clinical supervisor and the Assistant Principal (Student Wellbeing).

Should a counsellor think that a client is at risk of significant harm, and this needs to be reported to the Designated Safeguarding Lead, the counsellor will at all times attempt to gain the client's permission to do so, and only disclose relevant information. The Counsellor will treat with confidence all personal information about their clients, whether obtained directly, indirectly or by inference. Such information includes names, addresses, biographical details and other descriptions about the client's life and circumstances which result in identification. Factual and process notes are coded in order to prevent client's identification.

The Counsellor will not discuss case details outside the service, except with the permission of the client when they are talking to a fellow health professional such as a GP.

Training

In addition to their own Continuous Personal Development training and areas of interest, counsellors are required to complete regular training in the following areas:

- Safeguarding
- Prevent Duty
- Equity and Inclusion
- GDPR
- Health and safety

Supervision

All counsellors need to engage in regular clinical supervision to maintain and monitor standards and to comply with their ethical code. Counsellors will use time in a supervisory relationship to anonymously consider their cases with the outcome being offering the highest standards of ethical practice to their clients. Clinical supervision is separate to, and different from line management supervision which will be provided by their employer. Counsellors should undertake counselling supervision with a supervisor who has experience and understanding of students and Further and

Higher Education settings. The College will contribute to the costs of supervision, where appropriate, and allow the supervision to take place during working hours.

Promotion of the Counselling Service

The counselling service may be advertised to students and staff via:

- Induction talks
- Fresher's week
- Student Services publicity materials and posters
- Student handbooks
- Virtual learning environment
- Tutorial programmes
- Wellbeing Awareness talks

Counsellors attend staff meetings and contribute to the staff development programme for personal tutors, to ensure teaching staff understand the issues students may present during their studies, and how counselling can help them.

Monitoring and Evaluation

The counselling service is evaluated annually as part of the College's self-assessment process, and draws on:

- statistical data collected every 3 months on levels of service take-up
- anonymous client data reflecting the profile of service users and presenting issues
- Counselling Service Survey at the end of each academic year
- End of Therapy Evaluation

Appendix A:

Self-referral Counselling Form

As a service, we operate within the ethical framework set by the BACP. All data is kept confidentially according to GDPR guidelines, we only break confidentiality in exceptional circumstances. It is our responsibility to ensure that all students are as safe as possible.

Sometimes students who access the service may be in a high level of distress in their personal lives or with their mental health which may mean they are vulnerable to harm from others or unable to keep themselves safe. If, at any time, we are seriously worried about your health or wellbeing, we may contact your local GP, or emergency contact if you are under 18.



Emergency/Urgent Support	Non-Urgent Support
<p>Oxleas Mental Health Urgent Advice Line 0800 330 8590 (24 hr)</p> <p>Kent and Medway Single Point of Access Number (Urgent or emergency mental health): 0300 222 0123 (24/7) or text 07860 022819 (8am-10pm).</p> <p>Need help now? Papyrus: 0800 068 4141 Samaritans: 116 123, jo@samaritans.org Shout: Text YM to 85258</p> <p>Mind: Crisis café open 6pm-10pm. A safe and friendly place for anybody who is experiencing severe emotional and psychological distress.</p>	<p>The Mix: https://www.themix.org.uk/ Kooth: https://www.kooth.com/ Switchboard: https://switchboard.lgbt/ LGBTQ+: https://metrocharity.org.uk/youth/metro-zest Mind: https://www.mind.org.uk/information-support/side-by-side-our-online-community/ Anxiety: https://www.anxietyuk.org.uk/ Autistic Spectrum Disorder – ASD: https://www.bexleyvoice.org.uk/autism-asd.html OCD: https://ocdaction.org.uk/ Addictions: https://prpbexley.org.uk/ Gambling: https://www.gamblersanonymous.org.uk/find-a-meeting/169 Hate Crime: https://metrocharity.org.uk/youth/metro-zest Abuse: https://bexleywomensaid.org.uk/ Bereavement: https://careservices.bexley.gov.uk/Services/682</p>

Student Name:		Age:
Email address:		
Mobile Number:		
Programme (tick):	BA (Hons)	Diploma
Year of Study (tick):	YR1	YR2
Group		
GP Details	GP surgery:	

Student Availability	Please state availability for appointments		
Monday:			
Tuesday:			
Wednesday:			
Thursday:			
Friday:			
Student Appointment Method	In person		Microsoft Teams (Wednesday 2pm-5pm available)

Are you receiving support outside college?	
Please state medication and diagnosis if applicable.	

Please give us an outline with what is going on with your mental health right now.

Please complete the below table as honestly as you can.

Past History	Y	N
Recent adverse life event?		
Any history of eating disorders?		
Any history of substance abuse?		
Any known mental health disorders?		
Any history of violence to others?		
Any history of deliberate self-harm?		
Any history of suicide ideation?		
Any history of suicide attempts?		

Feelings/Thoughts	None of the time	Rarely	Some of the time	Often	Most of the time
I generally feel good about myself					
I have been feeling content					
I am able to relax					

I have been feeling interested in other people					
I am eating healthily					
I am sleeping well					
I have been thinking clearly					
I feel close to others e.g. friends / family					
I feel I can talk to others about my problems					
I feel confident					
I have been able to make decisions					
I have been feeling loved					
I have been interested in new things					
I feel able to deal with my problems					
I have been feeling optimistic about my future					

When completed please return this form by email to counselling@birdcollege.co.uk

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