



Counselling

Introduction: What is counselling?

At King Edward's School, counselling provides pupils with time, space and help to allow them to resolve their own problems. It provides a forum to explore worries, anxieties, problems or feelings that may interfere in their personal or academic life.

According to the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP), counselling takes place when a counsellor sees a client in a private and confidential setting to explore a difficulty the client is having, distress they may be experiencing or perhaps their dissatisfaction with life, or loss of a sense of direction and purpose. It is always at the request of the client as no-one can properly be "sent" for counselling.

For young people at King Edward's School, counselling is available in many forums and from different people (see [below](#)) both within the School and from external specialists; counselling is therefore often viewed as part of a spectrum of help and advice given to any member of the School community. Nevertheless, there are some difficulties in applying the above BACP definition to the field of counselling children and young people:

- Children and young people are less likely to initiate therapy or counselling; they may be referred or encouraged to attend counselling by teachers, carers or other adults.
- Children and young people with challenging behaviour may be referred for counselling in order to help them change their behaviour rather than to provide emotional support or alleviate any underlying distress.

King Edward's School provides the opportunity to pupils to undertake counselling as a way of helping young people through talking and listening. The child or young person is encouraged to express their feelings and thoughts about any issues of concern so they can understand themselves and their behaviour better and identify and improve their ways of coping.

We support BACP's recommendation that: "Counselling involves a deliberately undertaken contract with agreed boundaries and commitment to privacy and confidentiality. It requires explicit and informed consent" (BACP Code of Ethics and Practice).

Counselling offers pupils a regular space and time to talk or think about worries or difficulties and with the support of a professional counsellor helps young people explore their feelings and look at how they might want things to be different, by talking and using a range of activities. The Counsellor's support is available to pupils in relation to a range of issues including developmental issues, resolving family or friendship concerns, improving relationships, making choices, coping with changes, seeking insight and understanding, or growing as a person.

Counselling services are provided by trained, fully qualified counsellors, who are checked by the Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) and work within the BACP Code of Ethics and Practice.

How the counselling fits in with our pastoral provision at King Edward's School

All pupils in School can access a range of pastoral support. Staff are committed to providing support characterised by good listening and problem-solving strategies. Some staff may have been trained in aspects of counselling and will bring these skills to bear when talking with children. Where pupils, staff, or parents identify that there may be a need for additional support, our counselling service will be one of the options available. At King Edward's School, counselling is perceived as a significant contributor to the network of support within the School.

Examples of pastoral support and counselling for pupils at King Edward's School

- Pastoral support systems in School: School Chaplain, Heads of Section, Housemasters/Housemistresses, teachers, form tutors, School nurses, Deputy Head. The Pupil Wellbeing Committee and the Safeguarding Team meet regularly to discuss individual and collective case-histories and produce Pastoral Care Plans (the School's version of an Early Help Plan, to coordinate the School's network of support and expertise). The School's support network is also trained to refer matters to external bodies where appropriate and to provide information on local and national sources of support.
- School-based counsellors: through self-referral or identification by pastoral staff as above of the need for specific one-to-one counselling
- Other specialist support: CAMHS, Early Intervention Psychosis Team, Surrey Children's Single Point of Access (C-SPA)

What qualifications and training does our School counsellor have?

The School counsellor is aware of, and sensitive to, the different needs and demands that a School community imposes on young people and those who have responsibility for them. The current counsellor is knowledgeable and experienced in working with young people and is skilled in building a rapport with children and young people. Given the vulnerability of young people, our counsellor is qualified in accredited theoretical principles, high level practice skills and other specialised areas of counselling, for example art therapy and play therapy. Our counsellor has BACP accreditation. The counsellor works within the recognised Code of Ethics and Practice, of BACP.

When might counselling help individuals at King Edward's School?

Counselling can be an early intervention strategy to prevent deterioration in the emotional wellbeing, behaviour and attitude of a child or young person. It can provide an opportunity to enhance a young person's self-esteem and ability to cope more effectively in School. It is recognised that counselling will not always be an appropriate intervention, for example young people with long-standing behavioural or personality issues may find it difficult or impossible to engage in the counselling process.

Issues or concerns which may be raised with the counsellor could include:

- Family problems and relationships
- School-related issues – homework, pressure of exams
- Relationships with peers in School
- Relationships with peers outside School
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Anger
- Physical health
- Identity issues
- Sexual behaviours/orientation
- Bereavement/loss
- Self-harm
- Eating disorders
- Substance abuse
- Future education/careers
- Spirituality
- Social network abuse
- Sleep issues

Referrals, confidentiality and parental consent

Referrals for counselling are likely to follow the identification process and assessment of need as outlined earlier.

Confidentiality will generally be essential to the formal counselling process, but the counsellor will be at liberty to make disclosures on a 'need to know' basis to appropriate individuals and agencies if issues of child protection or safeguarding arise. Confidentiality is important:

- to enable the young person to develop a trusting relationship with the counsellor
- to allow the young person to be open 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
- to reflect obligations under the Human Rights Act 1998 Article 8, the right to privacy.

Mutual trust, goodwill and respect between counsellor, School, staff and parents, will help ensure that confidentiality is maintained. The staff and the counsellor will encourage a young person to discuss their counselling with their parents in appropriate cases.

A young person is free to talk to anyone about their counselling sessions if they wish, but will not be directly questioned by staff. Parents are encouraged to be sensitive to a young person's wishes when seeking to discuss their counselling.

The counsellor will not pass on any detailed accounts of sessions but may, with the child's permission, communicate periodically with School pastoral staff about the support being provided. Safeguarding concerns, and disclosures about criminal matters, must be passed on to the appropriate colleague or agency. A young person may wish a trusted member of staff to know they are receiving counselling in order to feel supported between counselling sessions.

Sometimes the counsellor will identify that it is in the best interests of the child or young person to liaise with or refer the young person to another agency for further help, for example, where there are mental health concerns. This will be with the young person's express permission and/or parental consent unless there are child protection or safeguarding concerns, in which case the need to safeguard the child or young person's welfare and safety will take precedence (please refer to Child Protection Policy).

What limitations are there to confidentiality?

Whilst it is recognised that: “Any attempt to remove the principle of confidentiality in counselling will rapidly undermine the overall ethos of the School as a caring educational community”, (Roger Casemore, Confidentiality & School Counselling, BACP 1995), a child or young person’s wishes about confidentiality may be overridden by the paramount duty to protect their safety or welfare. Information shared with the counsellor by the child or young person, and the counsellor records and notes will not be shared with others including the child or young person’s parents other than with the child’s or young person’s consent, because of concerns for the child or young person’s health or welfare, as a consequence of child protection or safeguarding concerns or as a result of a court order.

Breaching confidentiality

The counsellor will at the outset of working with a child or young person make it clear to the young person that they may need to breach confidentiality (i.e. tell someone and seek support). They will explain it may happen when the young person or any other person (adult or child) is at risk of significant harm. The counsellor will discuss this again with the young person if the need arises, and, if the child is “Gillick competent”¹, seek to gain their consent to disclosing concerns. The counsellor may make disclosures without the child or young person’s consent in appropriate circumstances.

The counsellor will follow the School’s Child Protection policy and in the first instance raise any concerns with the School’s Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), the Head or Treasurer as appropriate. Where possible, the counsellor will keep the child or young person informed and involve them in the process. 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.

The counsellor is not required to pass on information about a young person breaking a School rule or committing an offence, unless it could be deemed that by withholding information the counsellor was aiding and abetting a crime (e.g. a young person dealing drugs in School), or placing the child or young person or another person at the risk of significant harm.

Operation of the counselling service at King Edward’s School

Pupils can only benefit if they want counselling. Counselling is voluntary.

The Deputy Head and Health Centre Manager liaise with the counsellor who also sits on the Pupil Wellbeing Committee. The link teacher and the counsellor determine the counselling process. They ensure that the counselling process is open-ended, which means that the counselling is provided for as long as the counsellor considers that child or young person is continuing to benefit.

The counsellor has uninterrupted access to a reasonably quiet, comfortable room. The counsellor has a secure lockable place to keep case records and the use of a telephone in privacy. The counsellor determines how the appointments are arranged.

How does our counsellor evaluate and report back on the service?

The School counsellor will gather data and compile an annual report for the School, giving accurate recorded statistics on:

- numbers, age, gender and ethnicity of young people referred;

- the length and outcomes of counselling;
- the sorts of issues raised during counselling sessions.

The counsellor will be free to make recommendations about the way in which the School can make changes to support young people. All such feedback will be anonymised and no individual child will be identifiable. How are parents involved? Good practice involves working in partnership with parents. In most cases, children and young people are willing to talk to a parent to gain support.

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.

At King Edward's School, where a parent withholds consent or the young person may be very distressed and unwilling for the School to approach the parents, counselling can go ahead if the counsellor assesses the young person as Gillick competent¹ to consent in their own right.

If a young person is unwilling to involve their parents and is assessed competent, the young person may give their own written consent for counselling. No specific age is stated in legal guidance – it depends on their capacity to understand the issues involved and to give an informed consent.

The School counsellor will make this assessment. In accordance with the recommendations of the courts (in consultation with Deputy Head and Health Centre Manager when appropriate): "... 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. ordering an opportunity to meet the counsellor) and may wish to discuss the issue with a relevant member of the support services".

¹ "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 (ie counselling); and
- the young person having sufficient intelligence and understanding of the consequences of his or her actions.