

Guidance for Education Authorities Establishing Access to Counselling in Secondary Schools

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Introduction

1. This guidance is for education authorities and aims to provide an overarching framework and context for designing and developing an access to counsellors in schools service. It is expected that education authorities develop their own policy and guidance and can draw on this document as a guide.

2. The counselling service is a universal service and should be available to all secondary school pupils and primary, ASN school pupils aged 10 and over. This will complement the range of whole-school and targeted approaches already available in schools to help support the mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing of children and young people. Education Authorities and schools should ensure that counsellors are competent to practice with children and young people.

Aims and Principles

3. The joint Aims and Principles agreed by Scottish Government and local authorities are central to the development of local guidance and procedures and provide supportive guidance on the delivery of an authority wide service.

Issues to consider

4. School counselling should be aligned to the Getting It Right for Every Child approach and related local policies/procedures, and recognised as a potential intervention for children and young people with additional support needs, within the overall framework of staged intervention in schools. Counselling will provide a low-level, preventative, support within that context.

Role of Counsellors in schools

5. Formal counselling should be undertaken by a professional counsellor, acting in their specialist role, and in accordance with a strict code of ethics, which requires confidentiality, accountability and clinical supervision.

6. Counselling is one of a range of services that helps to support the health, emotional and social needs of young people and can help a healthy school culture. It is not intended to replace the support provided by adults in educational settings to promote the wellbeing of young people and should be seen as part of a whole school approach to supporting wellbeing. There may be times when maintaining and extending the support from a key adult is a more appropriate alternative to a child starting counselling. This can be identified through individual conversations with the child and/or parent/carer to inform the most appropriate form of ongoing future support.

7. This framework focuses on the provision of formal counselling and follows the British Association for Counsellors and Psychotherapy (BACP) definition of counselling which is:

'a professional activity delivered by qualified practitioners in schools. Counsellors offer troubled and/or distressed children and young people an opportunity to talk about their difficulties, within a relationship of agreed confidentiality.'

8. There are a wide range of delivery options which education authorities will want to consider which includes: including contracting individual counsellors directly, engaging with the local NHS service, engaging with local authority commissioned services or contracting with third sector providers.

9. The counselling support provided should conform to agreed professional standards, such as those provided by COSCA and BACP, and current best practice for school based counselling, specifically in respect of counsellors qualifications, supervision policy, child protection policies and continuous professional development and learning.

10. The joint agreement between SG and local government focusses on school counselling. This framework, and the associated funding, does not apply to other therapeutic support services which may be provided within schools such as play therapy, art therapy and drama therapy. Whilst these are recognised as the tools which a counsellor may use, as part of the provision of counselling, they are not intended to be supported as stand-alone approaches by this joint agreement.

Supervision

11. As well as counsellors, education authorities should engage supervisors who are members of professional bodies relating to counselling and have specific experience and qualifications relating to supervision. All counsellors are expected to have supervision in line with their professional body's recommendations.

Where counselling services could take place

12. Counselling should take place in an appropriately designated room which is safe, private and accessible. This will help the child or young person feel at ease and ensure a consistent approach to the counselling process.

13. The room should be located away from the population of the school or community setting. This will avoid a child/young person having to navigate through a room of their peers or other persons to reach the counselling room, or being seen entering, leaving the counselling room or waiting to be seen.

14. An education authority may decide to offer counselling services at other community locations particularly through the school holiday period. When delivering counselling outside of the school setting, there are unlikely to be the same kind of support structures in place. Education authorities and counselling

providers therefore need to consider appropriate measures around community-based counselling for it to be delivered safely and effectively in a non-stigmatising fashion.

15. Counselling services may also be delivered electronically via video communication. Providing counselling on this basis presents similar challenges, ethical or otherwise, as face-to-face counselling. It is important to be aware of the many differences involved when using different platforms, organisations and counsellors should take account of these differences before engaging in counselling online. Professional organisations have guidance on the provision of counselling services via electronic sources which it would be helpful for authorities to be aware of if they are considering utilising this approach.

Existing counselling services

16. A number of education authorities currently utilise Pupil Equity Funding (PEF) and Scottish Attainment Challenge (SAC) funding to support children and young people's mental health through existing counselling services. Schools or education authorities may choose to utilise the funding they currently receive through PEF or SAC on other approaches to support children and young people. If schools and/or local authorities wish to continue funding the counselling services funded through PEF/SAC, the same agreed aims and principles should be followed.

Link with wider Community Services

17. It is important for all professionals involved in emotional and mental health wellbeing provision to be well connected to and collaboratively engage to ensure the most effective and integrated response to ensure the best possible outcomes for children and young people are achieved.

18. Education Authorities, in designing the service should consider how links between schools, and their local community health and social services, and relevant third-sector organisations can be made. This will help to establish a holistic child centred approach that can enable care and support at the appropriate stage.

19. Education Authorities may also want to consider internal governance arrangements. And set out to all relevant members of staff where responsibility for the counselling sits within an authority and how information is shared to inform local design of the service.

20. Education authorities in designing the service should also consider how to make parents and carers aware of the service and how it is being offered to children and young people. Working in partnership with parents/carers can benefit the counselling relationship. There should be a clearly stated policy regarding counselling confidentiality, which sets definite limits to parental involvement, decisively underpinned by both ethical and legal factors and makes clear links to safeguarding arrangements.

Organisations who can help

21. There are a number of professional bodies and charitable organisations who can assist in developing an authority wide service and provide advice on the issues that need to be taken account of:

- British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) <https://www.bacp.co.uk/>
- Counselling and Psychotherapy in Scotland (COSCA) <http://www.cosca.org.uk/>
- Scottish Association for Mental Health (SAMH) <https://www.samh.org.uk/>
- Mental Health Foundation <https://www.mentalhealth.org.uk/>

22. This list is not exhaustive, there are many other providers who will be able to offer assistance.

Consider how to evaluate the impact of the service

23. When establishing the service in a school environment it is essential to check that the counselling provider has established robust pre and post counselling evaluation for children and young people. This can assist the school in identifying the improved outcomes for children and young people and also assist the education authority in identifying service level delivery outcomes.

24. Outcome monitoring is the regular measuring and tracking of client progress using standardised outcome measures. BACP encourages the collection of outcome data to monitor services, evaluate the quality of outcomes and benchmark services by comparing outcomes. Education authorities should ensure there are clear procedures in place for monitoring this data.

25. The operation of the counselling service within the school should be reviewed annually and any necessary improvements made. To inform this process a quality improvement process could be established.

Consider establishing a complaints procedure

26. Education Authority and schools complaints procedures are well established and understood. It is recommended that a written complaints procedure permitting complaints relating to the counselling service, or individual counsellors, is developed. It is worth considering how to advertise the procedure for parents/carers and to ensure that it is child friendly and accessible.

Progress Reporting to Scottish Government

27. In order to measure the impact and effectiveness of the national programme of providing access to counsellors in secondary schools, the Scottish Government has provided templates for local authorities to provide six monthly reports. The commission for reporting will be issued from the Scottish Government directly to Local Authority Heads of Education services.

28. The aim of the reporting is to assist education authorities in assessing impact of the service as well as progress towards the policy aim of providing access through every secondary school in the authority.

29. The reports will be considered by the Children and Young People's Mental Health and Wellbeing Programme Board which is jointly chaired by the Scottish Government and COSLA.



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