

## **INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL OF THE SACRED HEART COUNSELLING POLICY**

### **DEFINITIONS:**

#### **Counselling:**

Counselling takes place when a counsellor sees a student in a private and confidential setting to explore a difficulty the student is having, distress they may be experiencing or perhaps a dissatisfaction with life, or a loss of a sense of direction or purpose. It may be at the request of the student or a recommendation from a teacher.

#### **School Counsellor:**

The 'school counsellor' refers to the qualified members of faculty employed by the school in the role of a 'school counsellor'.

#### **The School:**

The 'school' refers to the International School of the Sacred Heart.

#### **The Principals:**

The 'principals' refers to the Kindergarten, Junior School, Middle School and High School Principals.

### **1. Role of the School Counsellor**

School counsellors can offer a student a safe and supportive environment to talk over difficult issues in confidence and will listen to their views, experiences and feelings without judgement, in an atmosphere of respect and empathy, based on a secure and trusting working relationship.

School counsellors can enable the student to focus on their concerns, giving them a vehicle to explore specific problems, make choices, cope with crises, work through feelings of conflict and improve relationships with others.

The role of the school counsellor is to:

- provide a counselling service to children enrolled from Kindergarten to Grade 12 at Sacred Heart.
- communicate and liaise with school faculty members in the best interest of the student, while within the limits of student confidentiality
- encourage partnership with the student's family when appropriate and beneficial
- liaise with principals in making referrals to other agencies
- act as a resource to school faculty members and students by offering an insight into counselling and promoting the service where possible
- maintain accurate counselling session records and write reports as and when required
- maintain and develop professional practice through regular and ongoing management and clinical supervision and training, and through involvement in service evaluation and auditing
- practise counselling in accordance with ethical principles, as a member of a counselling/psychotherapy professional body
- implement effective student and faculty member support and guidance. This includes understanding self and others, coping strategies, peer relationships and social skills, communication, problem solving, decision-making, conflict resolution, and study skills.
- assist parents and the school community with information regarding mental health issues and challenges.
- work proactively with the school community to promote and foster student wellbeing.

## **2. Types of Issues Brought to Counselling**

Children and young people may choose to access counselling for a variety of reasons, e.g. family, anger, stress, anxiety and self-worth. No issues are off-limits in a counselling session and this should be respected by faculty members and parents. A counselling room is a safe space for the student to speak freely, openly and honestly, without judgement.

## **3. Leadership and Management**

In order to achieve these aims, the school must actively support the Counselling Service to seek, to identify and to meet the very diverse needs of our students. This is achieved through a direct reporting line to the Principal and close working relationships with the faculty.

The school counsellor takes the lead role in coordinating counselling support and service provision, particularly regarding students and families.

In partnership with the principals and headmistress, the school counsellor monitors, advises, evaluates and plans for the development of counselling provision across the school.

Successful inclusion should result in every student feeling safe, confident and happy at school, whilst making the best progress towards achieving their potential - be that in lessons, during their play or lunchtimes or when involved in any of our school excursions and extra-curricular activities

#### **4. Ethical Framework & Complaints Procedure**

All school counsellors must be members of a professional body related to counselling or psychotherapy and adhere to an ethical framework or code. The code should be underpinned by ethical principles that give guidance and standards for good practice.

Please note that there is currently no professional body in regards to counselling in Japan. It is therefore up to the discretion of the school counsellors to decide which professional body they would like to adhere to (e.g. British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists, Australian Counselling Association, American Counselling Association).

In accordance with the guiding body, the British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists (BACP), the ethical principles of Counselling for our school are:

- 1. *Fidelity*: honouring the trust placed in the practitioner**
- 2. *Autonomy*: respect for the student to be self-governing**
- 3. *Beneficence*: a commitment to promoting the student's well-being**
- 4. *Non-malificence*: a commitment to avoiding harm to the student**
- 5. *Justice*: the fair and impartial treatment of all students and the provision of adequate services**
- 6. *Self-respect*: fostering the practitioner's self-knowledge and care for self.**

School counsellors will try their best to adhere to these principles as follows:

- put students first by:
  - making students their primary concern while working with them
  - providing an appropriate standard of service to students
- work to professional standards by:
  - working within their competence

- keeping their skills and knowledge up to date
- collaborating with colleagues to improve the quality of what is being offered to students
- ensuring that their well-being is sufficient to sustain the quality of the work
- keeping accurate and appropriate records
- show respect by:
  - valuing each student as a unique person
  - protecting student confidentiality and privacy
  - agreeing with students on how they will work together
  - working in partnership with students
- build an appropriate relationship with students by:
  - communicating clearly what students have a right to expect from them
  - communicating any benefits, costs and commitments that students may reasonably expect
  - respecting the boundaries between their work with students and what lies outside that work
  - not exploiting or abusing students
  - listening out for how students experience their working together
- maintain integrity by:
  - being honest about the work
  - communicating qualifications, experience and working methods accurately
  - working ethically and with careful consideration of how they fulfil their legal obligations

Demonstrate accountability and candour by:

- being willing to discuss with students openly and honestly any known risks involved in the work and how best to work towards their student's desired outcomes by communicating any benefits, costs and commitments that students may reasonably expect
- ensuring that students are promptly informed about anything that has occurred which places the student at risk of harm or causes harm in their work together, whether or not students are aware of it, and quickly taking action to limit or repair any harm as far as possible – reviewing their work with students in supervision

- monitoring how students experience their work, and the effects of their work, together with them.

## **5. Complaints Procedure**

If necessary, complaints alleging a breach of professional standards, including confidentiality, will be dealt with by reference to the Principals. The Principals will take responsibility for investigating the nature of the complaint.

## **6. Referral Process Within School**

Referrals to access the counselling service can be made at any time by teachers, parents, outside agencies, peers, or students who self-refer.

Students have the right to refuse or discontinue counselling at any time, and it is the school counsellor's responsibility to ensure that the student's rights to autonomy are respected. It is important to recognise that students can only benefit if they want to be involved in the counselling process.

Referrals to consult a school counsellor are made by approaching the school counsellors directly in person, via email, or through the school counsellors' booking site.

It is the school counsellors' responsibility to ensure a Referral Form (see Appendix 1) is completed for every referral by teachers.

Faculty members may also seek assistance from Counselling service for classroom or group intervention to provide psychosocial education or support to address generic or specific needs. This may take the form of classroom lessons, observations, workshops, presentations or programmes. Consultation with school counsellors is required to ascertain how best to proceed.

## **7. Potentially vulnerable groups**

There are a number of identified groups of students and families for whom this policy is particularly pertinent:

- Students with Special Educational Needs (SEN)
- Students whose home language is not English (ESL)
- Students with physical or sensory impairments
- Students who might be subject to abuse or harassment, for whatever reason
- Students who are young carers
- Students whose family are in crisis or under great stress
- Students at risk of significant harm or neglect
- Students with poor attendance and/or punctuality
- Students who are at risk of disaffection and exclusion from school
- Students who have a temporary high-level need

## **8. Consent**

Parental consent for counselling of students is agreed upon when signing the acceptance to Sacred Heart, where appropriate.

In Junior school, there is an understanding that while the majority of counselling is kept confidential, there may be some sharing of information and liaison with parents and faculty members, with the child's knowledge and consent.

It is our protocol at Sacred Heart to work in partnership with parents wherever possible, except in circumstances involving Child Protection concerns.

For a student to be eligible to receive counselling, s/he must understand the nature of counselling and be able to make a valid verbal counselling contract, including the ability to understand the principle of confidentiality and the need for this to be overridden where there is a risk of harm.

Students can consent to attending counselling without the parent/carer's involvement, if that student is deemed Gillick competent. "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."

As guidance for Gillick competency, the School Counselling Service at Sacred Heart will take the following into consideration:

1. The young person has explicitly requested that their parents/carers have no knowledge about them receiving counselling.

2. The school counsellor has done everything they can to persuade the young person to involve their parents/carers.
3. Documentation clearly states why the young person does not want their parents/carers to be informed.
4. The young person understands the advice/information they have been given and has sufficient maturity to understand what is involved and what the implications are.
5. They can comprehend and process information relating to counselling.
6. The young person can communicate their decisions and reasons for it.
7. This is a rational decision based on their own value system or religious belief.
8. The young person is making the decision for themselves and not being coerced or influenced by another person.
9. The school counsellor must be confident in safeguarding and promoting the welfare of the young person.
10. Without counselling, would the young person's physical or emotional health be likely to suffer?

In cases where the child is NOT Gillick competent and parental consent is NOT forthcoming, Sacred Heart will continue efforts to engage the parents via invitation to meet the school counsellor and Principal/Headmistress to discuss the issue.

### **9. Session Allocation**

Appointments are made subject to availability and to urgency.

Sessions will generally be weekly, fortnightly, or monthly, depending on the need, for a maximum of 6 sessions. Any extension to this will be considered on a case by case basis depending on the needs of the individual student. After the 3rd consecutive counselling session, a review session with the student will be conducted by the school counsellor to track progress and revise counselling goals.

Sessions will be for an average of 20 minutes, with a maximum of 40 minutes for secondary students, in exceptional circumstances. Junior school counselling sessions are generally for 20 minutes.

Appointments are to be timetabled in class time, using free periods or during supervised study periods (e.g. Wise Freedom) where possible, in consultation with the student and teachers regarding important learning deadlines. Release from lesson times is to be spread across the individual timetable to minimise disruption from subject learning. Communication regarding

appointment times will be made via email by the school counsellor to the relevant teachers at the beginning of each day. The school counsellor will not advise the reason for consultation to teachers without parent and/or student consent.

Students should not be marked as absent in class, when they have visited the school counsellor.

## **10. Where Counselling will take place**

Counselling will take place in the Counselling office (Room 295), or the K/JS Conference Room. Sessions may take place in a different location if agreed upon by the school counsellor and student, and the relevant principal will be notified.

## **11. Privacy and Confidentiality**

A student's right to privacy and confidentiality is the basis for an effective counselling relationship. They are fundamental requirements for keeping trust and respecting the student's autonomy. Good practice dictates the use of a clear contract to explain to students the boundaries of confidentiality a school counselling service can offer.

The aims of this explanation are:

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

Student consent is the ethically preferred way of resolving dilemmas over confidentiality.

Exceptional circumstances may prevent the school counsellor from seeking consent to a breach of confidence, due to the urgency and seriousness of the situation. In such circumstances the school counsellor has an ethical responsibility to act in ways which balances the student's right to confidentiality against the need to communicate with others.

### **11.1 Breaching Confidentiality**



At the initial session, the school counsellor will make it clear to the student that they may need to breach confidentiality in terms of telling others and seeking help. **This may happen when the young person, or any other person (adult or child) is at risk of significant harm or danger.**

In the case of threats of suicide or severe self-harm (as described below), there is a general acceptance of a need for intervention and of breaking confidentiality.

The school counsellor will discuss the possibilities of breach again if the need arises during the counselling relationship. Where possible, the school counsellor will keep the young person informed and involved in the process of gaining assistance from others.

The school 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 school counsellor was aiding and abetting a crime.

Although self-injury is non-suicidal behaviour and relied on as an attempt to cope and manage, it must be recognized that the emotional distress that leads to self-injury can also lead to suicidal thoughts and actions.

It is therefore of utmost importance that all incidents of self-injury are taken seriously and that the underlying issues and emotional distress are thoroughly investigated and necessary emotional support given, in order to minimise any greater risk.

### **11.2 Reports of Suicidal Ideation/Intent**

Suicide refers to the deliberate taking of one's life. Suicidal behaviour includes the spectrum of activities related to suicide, including suicidal thinking (ideation) and suicide attempts. Some people include risk-taking behaviours in which there is some risk of immediate or later self-harm eg. substance use, disordered eating, over exercising.

Sacred Heart is committed to the creation of a school environment that helps to build protective factors within our students and school community that will reduce the risk of a student resorting to suicidal behaviour.

This includes activities, policies and programs that help to build:

Connectedness - a sense of belonging with others and connectedness to our school and community.

Resilience - the development of capacities within a person that promote positive outcomes, including personal coping skills and strategies for dealing with adversity, such as problem-solving, communication and social skills, optimistic thinking and help seeking.

A sense of personal safety - through the implementation of our Positive Peer Relationships Anti-Bullying Policy. Students are taught that it is right to seek support for a friend that they fear may be at risk of suicide.

The school will NOT ignore and will follow up immediately;

- any student, parent or faculty “rumours” about a possible suicide attempt
- any suicide notes/emails/messages communicated to peers, faculty and faculty members by students.

If a student verbally reports suicide ideation to a faculty member:

- a teacher listens in a kind and calm manner
- a teacher should use “I” statements, e.g. “I am concerned about you,” or “I am worried about you”, or “I will help you find someone who can help you.”
- a teacher explains to student that it is his/her responsibility to report student’s situation to the school counsellor and principal to help the student receive the support that is needed
- the immediate safety of the student is paramount and an adult should remain with the student at all times
- a teacher should accompany the student to the principal/school counsellor/student health officer or find someone to bring one of these people to them

If a student sends a suicide ideation note, email or message to a teacher or faculty members member, the teacher or faculty members member MUST contact the principal and school counsellor immediately.

If, after following up on notes or rumours, a student is found safe in the school, the counselor will meet with them immediately to assess their well-being and the background of the suicide concern.

The information will be shared with the student's parents with the recommendation of referral to an outside mental health provider if one is not already involved.

If the student cannot be located at school, the family will be contacted immediately. If the parents are unaware of the student's whereabouts and safety, the parents will be asked to contact the police.

The school counsellor does not have to break confidentiality if a student discusses suicidal ideations, with no intention of planning, nor completing suicide. A risk assessment will be completed at the discretion of the school counsellor. The school counsellor will report their concern to the appropriate principal without providing confidential information. This can be actioned without the consent of the student, although it is preferred that they agree.

### **11.3 Attempted Suicide**

In cases where a suicide attempt has been disclosed to a school counsellor or member of the International School of the Sacred Heart community, a student's parents must come to school to collect them immediately. The student can not be left alone within the school. This is a non-negotiable decision, as the school must also consider the safety of our community, and the best interest of the student at risk.

The student is not allowed back into school until a follow up risk assessment has been completed by a mental health professional (e.g. clinical psychologist, psychiatrist) and a report has been submitted to the school. Following this report, it is at the school's discretion whether or not the student is allowed to return.

If a student has attempted suicide and is deemed ready to return to school, the school will work closely with the student, family and any involved mental health professionals, to support the student upon their return.

This would include the development of a Student Safety and Support Plan that outlines:

- regular contact and communication times with the student to check on their health and well-being
- any flexible timetable arrangements that may be needed and for what length of time
- activities, plans and goals to assist the student's well-being at school
- people the student can talk to and their locations.

The student is an active participant in the development of this plan.

#### **11.4 Other members of the school:**

Support will also be available to any faculty members and friends of the student if they would like or need it as the welfare of the community is paramount. Particular attention is also paid to identifying any other at risk students.

#### **11.5 School Response Protocol:**

In the event of either an attempted or a completed suicide the school has a comprehensive school response protocol to follow that guides the immediate response to the incident and the restoring of well-being in the school community.

#### **11.6 Reports of Self-Harm**

If a student reports self-harm to a faculty or staff member:

- a teacher listens in a kind, calm and non judgemental manner
- a teacher should use “I” statements, e.g. “I am concerned about you,” or “I am worried about you”, or “I will help you find someone who can help you.”
- a teacher should not question the student about why she has harmed herself, or ask to see old wounds, or question the student about how she wounds herself
- a teacher explains to the student that it is his/her responsibility to report the student’s behaviour to the school counsellor and principal to help the student receive support that is needed and keep student safe
- a teacher should accompany the student to principal/school counsellor/student health officer or find someone to bring one of these people to them
- in the case of an acutely distressed student, the immediate safety of the student is paramount and an adult should remain with the student at all times
- a student should be taken to the student health officer for medical treatment if she has open wounds and the instrument used to self-harm should be removed

The following will be made clear to a self-harming student:

- self-injury is a way of coping with emotional pain, and therefore it is helpful to work with a counsellor to find other ways of coping

- the student may be asked to show the injuries to the counsellor with the student health officer present or vice versa. This is to determine whether urgent medical care is required, however, this cannot be enforced without the consent of the student.
- the student is asked not to self injure at school and not to openly display new or old wounds
- the student should not talk graphically to other students about their injuries or describe methods used
- parents will be notified of self-harming behaviours

### **11.7 Reports of Severe Self-Harm**

For the purposes of these policies, ‘severe self-harm’ refers to actions or behaviours that can permanently disable or injure a student, or result in death (e.g. long-term restrictive eating, deep cutting of self, substance abuse, burning of self).

If a report of serious self-harm has been made, the principal/school counsellor/student health officer must activate the response team.

This may consist of:

- The principal
- Student Health Officer
- School counsellor
- Teacher to whom the initial report was made
- Homeroom teacher

The response team will gather further information and decide on the best course of action. This could include:

- Providing support for child and family within the school
- Provision of community and web-based resources to child and parents, for understanding and addressing self-injury.
- Family meeting
- Outside referral for support and/or counselling
- A request for the release of information to the school so that an appointed person may communicate with any outside professionals who are assisting the student.
- Reporting to outside authorities if parent refuses to act upon school’s advice/recommendations

Note: When determining a course of action, the student will be involved as an active participant in each step.

### **11.8 Self-harm prevention:**

The school will NOT teach lessons or hold assemblies explicitly about self-harm. Instead, we will educate students about signs of distress in themselves and others, as well as teaching about positive coping skills. Students will be educated that by seeking help and advice for a friend who is in distress, they are taking responsible action and being a good friend, and that their friend will be treated in a caring and supportive manner.

The peer group of a person who self-harms may value the opportunity to speak with the school counsellor.

### **11.9 Child Protection policy**

The school counselling service will be familiar with the Sacred Heart Child Protection policy and procedures in this regard.

There will be a need to breach confidentiality in the interests of child safety if a student confides about abuse (physical, emotional, verbal, sexual or other abuse) or neglect, to self or another juvenile or minor (less than 18 years). The need to safeguard children will always take precedence over the child's right to autonomy and to confidentiality.

**The school has a legal obligation to report any cases of abuse (physical, emotional, verbal, sexual or other abuse) or neglect to the Child Guidance Centre as quickly as possible.** The school does not require the parents permission for this contact to be made. However, depending on the circumstances, the school will try to notify the parents before contacting the Child Guidance Centre.

The relevant Child Guidance Centre is dependent on the ward of the student's home address. Once the Child Guidance Centre has been notified of the abuse/neglect, the school will continue to support the student, and the Child Guidance Centre will conduct the investigation into these allegations.

Assessment needs to be conducted as to whether the child is “in need” or “at risk of significant harm”. This enables the necessary early intervention of family support to be implemented as a preventative strategy before the situation deteriorates.

### **11.10 Court or other Legal proceedings**

Confidentiality may be breached by law, if school counselling faculty members at Sacred Heart are subpoenaed to attend a hearing or other court proceeding. The school counselling team cannot guarantee that student information can be kept confidential, however every attempt will be made to reveal as little as possible in a legal setting. If this situation arises, Sacred Heart will advise in advance and work with parents to handle this situation as respectfully as possible.

If a school counsellor at Sacred Heart is given a court order to appear in court or produce their counselling records, they will report to the relevant division principal and will refer to the schools legal representative to obtain legal advice to limit disclosure of non-relevant sensitive student information.

Due to the sensitive nature of counselling young children and adolescents, school counsellors should be fully aware of the risks of litigation arising from, for example, claims of negligence or breaches of confidentiality. Employed school counsellors will be covered by the concept of vicarious liability for alleged acts of negligence carried out as part of their duties.

### **11.10 Sharing Information with Other Stakeholders**

The school counselling team will work in a multi-disciplinary way and communicate with school faculty members, other agencies and specialised services, whilst maintaining an appropriate level of confidentiality.

In regard to school faculty members and academic goals, school counsellors are asked to “test” sharing of counselling goals validity by considering 2 questions:

- a) Do team members need to know this?
- b) How will knowing this help the team make decisions that will facilitate the student’s educational progress?

It will be common for the relevant teachers, homeroom teachers, principals and/or headmistress to be informed of students accessing counselling services, however not necessarily the reasons or contents of sessions. This can only be shared subject to parental/student consent.

A general update regarding progression is considered sufficient, unless conducive to student wellbeing and academic success.

When the need arises, liaison with outside agencies to support a student's mental health issues is necessary and a written consent to provide/seek additional information to a Third party from parents and/or students will be obtained in every case (See Appendix 2). Contact with the relevant Child Guidance Centre is an exception, where neither student nor parental permission is required for the school to breach confidentiality.

## **12. Other Professionals**

At times, it may be necessary to refer students or faculty members to outside agencies for specialist therapeutic intervention. Serious, ongoing mental health issues and family based problems are referred to appropriate outside professionals/agencies for full assessment and support. Sacred Heart will not accept responsibility for individual referrals to practitioners. The school can recommend providers, however the selection of outside agencies and practitioners will remain the sole discretion of the parents seeking assistance.

## **13. Supervision**

All school counsellors need to engage in regular clinical supervision, (also known as external consultative support) to ensure that the school counsellor maintains ethical competence and confidence in their work. Requirements for supervision are clearly described in BACP's (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) Ethical Framework.

School counsellors at Sacred Heart will undertake regular counselling supervision sessions with an external Supervisor who is qualified and has experience and understanding of children and young people and of the school setting. School counsellors are responsible for making their own arrangements for supervision. Supervision will take place outside school hours, with costs covered by the counselor.



School counsellors will also require separate line management supervision to help with administrative requirements, accountability, and the development of the service. This is not the same as counselling supervision and the two fulfill different functions.

Peer supervision is also recommended through school counsellors' networks. Regular meetings are encouraged to foster best practice and provide opportunity for monitoring of caseloads and sharing of resources.

#### **14. Faculty members' Development and Training**

School counsellors are encouraged to pursue ongoing professional development, utilising local conferences and workshops where possible.

#### **15. Record Keeping**

The school handles student data in accordance with Japanese laws related to privacy and protection of personal information and reflects best practice in data management. Each student's records are stored in a locked filing cabinet, in a locked Counselling office (Room 295). These filing cabinets are used by the school counsellors only. The codes are shared with principals and the headmistress, in case of emergency.

#### **16. Evaluation and Recording**

The school counselling team and the Principals will meet regularly to review the service and address any issues arising.