

## Avon Old Farms School

### Counseling and Psychological Services Center Student and Family Resource Guide

Avon Old Farms School Counseling and Psychological Services Center (CPS) is part of the School's Health Center services available to students and is committed to supporting the emotional well-being of each student and aims to create a welcoming environment that fosters healthy adolescent development. In support of its commitment to student mental health, CPS provides short-term mental health counseling, check-in sessions, and crisis intervention while school is in session. CPS is not intended to provide long-term mental health services but can serve as a liaison with outside providers in supporting students while on campus who require such services.

#### Staff

Links: Avon Old Farms' [medical staff](#) and [mental health staff](#).

#### Scope of Services

Services available through CPS include brief, goal-oriented mental health counseling through a variety of treatment modalities, check-in sessions, crisis intervention services, and referrals to outside providers. Our mental health counselors are available to meet with students for a variety of reasons such as during times of transition, heightened stress, emotional difficulties, critical change, and other temporary situations where counseling services may be beneficial. Our treatment providers also help students find and learn tools and coping mechanisms to help them deal with adversity and other challenges. Brief treatment services through CPS are part of the regular Health Center services and are therefore included in a student's tuition and fees.

Efforts will be made to conduct sessions outside of class times whenever possible. However, if it becomes necessary for a student to meet with a counselor during class time, the counselor will email the Dean of Students office directly to excuse the student from class.

A more detailed description of the types of services provided by our school's CPS staff can be summarized as follows:

- **Mental Health Counseling:** Counseling services are initiated by referral, whether by the student himself or a parent, faculty member, or other adult. Students may be referred for

emotional concerns, academic issues, substance use/abuse, or in connection with disciplinary matters. Within one week of a referral, a treatment provider will schedule an intake/planning session with the student and establish a treatment schedule and goals. Brief, goal-oriented treatment will be used to assist students as needed in working through normative developmental hurdles, learning coping strategies, and/or helping a student develop a strong sense of self. School-based treatment is intended to be short-term; students who require more intensive or specialized services may be referred to outside agencies/providers in conjunction with seeing a CPS treatment provider.

- **Check-ins:** Check-in sessions with a treatment provider may be provided for a variety of reasons including to conduct an initial meeting following referral when a student may need temporary support to handle an isolated incident. When a provider meets with a student for a check-in session, the provider will assess the student's needs based on the reason for the check-in and determine with the student (or others where appropriate) if continued treatment is appropriate.
- **Crisis Intervention:** Treatment providers are available to provide crisis intervention to students who are in serious emotional distress while school is in session. This may include conducting a risk assessment, coordinating emergency care, and making recommendations to the Dean of Students office and Associate Head of School on next steps to ensure the safety of the student and community. In a situation where a student may be displaying behavior of concern or is a potential danger to himself or others, the School may require an outside evaluation of a student in order to understand how best to support and manage a student's care.
- **Referrals:** Following initial referral and assessment, if our staff determine that a student's needs can be effectively managed within the short term, the student will remain under the care of our CPS staff. In some cases, however, our team may determine that a student needs additional support beyond what is reasonably available through CPS. In such instances, CPS staff may refer students who require more intensive or specialized services to appropriate outside providers, with continued coordination with our CPS staff. The School also contracts with a local psychiatrist who is able to provide medication consultation, assessment, and psychiatric care if needed on a referral basis. Our counselors will work closely with any outside providers to ensure that adequate support is in place for students and will work with the student and parents/guardians to ensure that the student is fully supported during the referral process. Services provided by any outside clinician or agency, including the outside psychiatrist, are not included in a student's tuition and fees and will therefore be the responsibility of the

parent/guardian.

### **Compliance with Treatment Recommendations**

AOF believes strongly that a student's health needs are best met through a cooperative and collaborative relationship between the School, a student, his parents/guardians, and outside providers where appropriate. To this end, it is expected that students and their families will provide the authorizations necessary to exchange pertinent information about a student's current health needs and that all parties will cooperate in developing and implementing plans for care. It is equally important for students to participate in recommended treatment, whether through CPS or as recommended with outside providers. If a student is noncompliant with recommendations for mental health treatment or other important medical care, and the CPS provider determines that the lack of treatment may be detrimental to the student, the CPS provider may notify the parents/guardian and Dean of Students; continued noncompliance may result in the need for a Medical Leave of Absence, or in some cases, impact the student's continued enrollment at AOF.

### **Referral Process**

Students are able to self-refer to CPS or may be referred by parents/guardians and/or faculty/staff. Following referral, a treatment provider will first determine if the appropriate action is a brief check-in or if more ongoing formal support is required. Informed consent will be obtained from all students. If continued treatment is the appropriate course of action, the student will undergo a formal intake session to assure that the appropriate interventions are provided and to establish/develop the most appropriate treatment plan.

#### **Referral Process for Student Self-Referral and Parents/Guardians:**

To make a referral, send an email to the CPS at: [counseling@avonoldfarms.com](mailto:counseling@avonoldfarms.com). Please include who is making the referral, the name and grade/age of the student being referred, and the reason for the referral.

#### **Referral Process for Faculty/Staff:**

Faculty/staff may refer a student by contacting the Dean of Students office and explaining the basis for their concern. The student will then be discussed in the Student Health Council. If the

Student Health Council recommends that a referral to CPS is appropriate, a staff member will reach out to that student within a week to coordinate an initial check-in with a treatment provider.

### **Training/Education**

All student-facing faculty and administration are trained in listening skills and identifying students who may require additional support. All student monitors and peer counselors are also trained in these areas.

### **Confidentiality**

While our Health Center and CPS staff endeavor to maximize the privacy of all information shared within the context of our health and mental health services, it cannot guarantee confidentiality in all situations and tries to make students aware of scenarios in which treatment providers and other school staff may need to disclose information about a student or his health status. It is also important to note that the Health Center is not a “covered entity” as defined under the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (“HIPAA”). Therefore, HIPAA does not apply to the Health Center and its records, although it typically does apply to independent health care providers to whom we may refer a student.

It should be noted that the Health Center works closely with CPS. As a result, the Health Center will be aware that individuals are receiving services from CPS staff as necessary for purposes of coordinating care.

All issues discussed with our mental health professionals and student records are private and confidential unless the health and safety of the student or others is at risk, or unless disclosure is otherwise required by law. These situations include a student being in imminent danger of hurting self or others and certain cases of child or elder abuse or neglect. In this case, parents and appropriate personnel are informed.

The CPS team strives to collaborate and work with families regarding their child. However, pursuant to Connecticut law, a minor can consent on their own behalf to receive care and treatment without parental consent for substance abuse and mental health treatment. (See Conn. Gen. Stat §19a-14c).

Our CPS staff will always encourage students to communicate with their parents/guardian regarding all aspects of their healthcare, but must respect the minor's confidentiality rights and may only notify a parent or guardian if: (i) notification is necessary for the minor's well-being; (ii) the treatment is solely for mental health and not for a substance use disorder; and (iii) we have provided the minor with the opportunity to express an objection to the notification or disclosure.

### **Sharing of Health Information**

Our treatment providers collaborate with school staff and other professionals involved in the care of the student as needed while protecting students' confidentiality, as much as possible, to provide the best support and treatment for the student. Disclosure of a student's health information may occur if the health and/or safety of a student or others is at risk.

The Student Health Council meets weekly to discuss any significant student concerns. Certain school faculty/staff and treatment providers may be made aware of recommendations made by the Student Health Council that could be important in their work with and support of the student.

Please refer to the *School Medical Consent* and *Medication Policy*, both signed in Magnus, for situations when medical and/or mental health information may be shared.

### **Communication with Outside Providers**

As a condition of enrollment, parents and students agree to provide all required health information to the School and to sign any written authorizations the School determines necessary to permit the School to obtain or share health information. In order to provide appropriate care, CPS staff may request that parents/guardians (and students, in some cases) complete an Authorization for Release of Information Form to provide consent for mental health or other medical staff in our Health Center to collaborate with outside therapists or other medical providers to ensure that the student is fully supported.

### **Family Obligation to Share Relevant Medical Information**

In order to provide health care services safely in the boarding school setting, our Health and Counseling Centers must have full and accurate information about each student's medical and psychiatric history,

including any medications the student is taking. Disclosure of this information is required in the admissions process and in Magnus (the school's electronic health records) for both boarding and day students, and must be ongoing throughout a student's tenure at the school.

### **At Risk or Self-Injurious Behavior**

If the school becomes aware of a situation where a student may be at risk or engaged in self-injurious behavior, he will be referred to CPS and assessed for safety by a member of our staff or by an outside mental health professional. Any assessment done by an outside provider will be at the family's expense, and CPS staff will need to be in contact with the provider. If it is determined that a student is unsafe to remain on campus for an extended time, the School will implement a Medical Leave of Absence (MLOA) in accordance with our MLOA policy.

### **Psychotropic Medication**

Any student who is taking a psychotropic medication (selective serotonin uptake inhibitors (SSRI), stimulants, or similar medications) is strongly encouraged to be connected with an outside mental health treatment provider for regular treatment and support.

Students who are taking psychotropic medications and meeting with an outside treatment provider on a regular basis will be required to sign a release of information so that communication between the outside treatment provider and CPS staff can occur if needed. If they are not seeing an outside treatment provider, they will be required to meet with a member of our CPS staff on a regular basis.

Students taking these medications must also meet with their prescribing psychiatrist or pediatrician on a regular basis for appropriate medication management and monitoring.

Students taking any psychotropic medication must adhere to the Medication Policy and other medication related policies listed in Magnus and the Student Handbook.

### **Medical Leave of Absence**

The School recognizes that a student may experience a mental health or medical condition that cannot

be adequately managed on campus, despite reasonable efforts. If the student has a medical or mental health condition that prevents him from being able to meet the School's academic or behavioral expectations, or if the condition is causing undue disruption in the School or otherwise poses a health or safety risk to others, the School may grant, and in some cases require, a Medical Leave of Absence (MLOA). A student, his family, or the School may initiate a request for a MLOA. The need for a MLOA is ultimately determined by the Associate Head of School in collaboration with school treatment personnel, and following consultation as may be needed with any outside treatment providers working with the student. In determining the need for a MLOA, the School will consider the student's medical and/or mental health needs, his ability to effectively function in all aspects of the School, his school commitments, and the well-being and safety of the School community.

See our complete MLOA Policy in our Student Handbook.