

GUIDE TO SEL COUNSELING 2025-26



Table of Contents

| | |
|--|-----------|
| Table of Contents..... | 1 |
| 1. SEL Counseling at Graded..... | 2 |
| 2. Roles and Responsibilities of a School Counselor at Graded..... | 2 |
| 2.1 Counseling within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Framework..... | 4 |
| Families..... | 5 |
| Teachers, OLS, ELL Specialists, and Intervention Specialists..... | 5 |
| School Leadership..... | 6 |
| 2.2 Child Safeguarding..... | 6 |
| 2.3 Graded's Student Support Referral Process..... | 7 |
| Tier 1: Universal Supports..... | 8 |
| Tier 2: Targeted Supports..... | 8 |
| Tier 3: Intensive Supports..... | 9 |
| 3. External Specialists..... | 9 |
| 3.1 Referral to External Specialists..... | 9 |
| 3.2 Evaluation from External Specialists..... | 9 |
| 4 Confidentiality & Data Protection..... | 10 |
| 4.1 Student Confidentiality..... | 10 |
| 4.2 Requests for Student Information to and from External Specialists..... | 11 |
| 5. Individualized Off-Campus Learning Plans..... | 12 |
| References:..... | 13 |

1. SEL Counseling at Graded

This guide outlines and provides direction for school counseling practices at Graded. The resource serves as a comprehensive guide for the Graded school community and SEL counselors to create a clear understanding of the role of SEL counseling at Graded. It is designed to support students, families, and educators by outlining best practices, ethical considerations, and procedural guidelines that shape counseling services at the school. By providing transparency in the counseling program, this guide helps the wider community understand the roles and responsibilities of SEL counselors, the interventions they implement, and how SEL counseling aligns with Graded's mission, vision, values, and support structures.

Graded – The American School of São Paulo is deeply committed to its core values—Intellectual Curiosity, Perseverance, Respect, Integrity, and Kindness. These values, along with the Characteristics of a Graded Learner, serve as the foundation for the counseling team's approach. The Characteristics of a Graded Learner define the qualities the school strives to instill in students, encouraging them to be curious, creative, collaborative, driven, and ethical. These principles shape the development of students' social, emotional, and academic well-being, ensuring that every student is supported in reaching their full potential.

The counseling program at Graded aims to support students' academic and social-emotional development. The SEL counseling team is part of a broader Student Support Services team, which includes Optimal Learning Services (OLS) specialists, English Language Learning (ELL) specialists, and intervention specialists. This multidisciplinary structure ensures that all students receive necessary support tailored to their unique needs. It reflects Graded's commitment to holistic development and continuity of care throughout a student's time at Graded.

2. Roles and Responsibilities of a School Counselor at Graded

Graded's Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Counseling Team integrates international and American best practices to support student well-being. Grounded in the standards set by the International School Counselor Association (ISCA) and the American School Counselor Association (ASCA), the approach is proactive, data-informed, and culturally-responsive. This comprehensive SEL program promotes emotional resilience, academic success, and personal growth, providing all students the support needed to thrive in a global learning environment. The counseling program at Graded follows clear procedures and protocols to ensure consistency, transparency, and alignment with school policies. These practices and procedures are within a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) framework and include confidentiality, consent, referrals, and collaboration with Graded teachers and specialists and external specialists. Fostering equity and inclusion is a core component of the counseling program. Counselors provide support that is accessible and culturally

responsive to all students, regardless of background or individual circumstances. They advocate for students facing systemic barriers and work to cultivate an inclusive school environment where every student has an opportunity to succeed.

Delivering a comprehensive counseling program includes both direct and indirect services:

1. Direct services involve in-person interactions with students to develop essential skills.
2. Indirect services are for or on behalf of students that involve leadership, advocacy, and collaboration to enhance student achievement and promote equity and access.

| Percent | Item | Elements and Strategies | Recipient | Methods |
|---------|--|--|---|--|
| 80% | Direct Student Services | School Counseling Core Curriculum <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Instruction ▪ Group Activities Individual Student Planning <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Appraisal ▪ Advisement Responsive Services <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Counseling ▪ Crisis Response | All students Identified Students | Interactions with students in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Large groups ▪ Classroom ▪ Small groups ▪ Individual |
| | Indirect Student Services | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Referrals ▪ Consultation ▪ Collaboration | All students Identified Students | Interactions with others: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teachers ▪ Administrators ▪ Parents ▪ Outside mental health professionals, etc. |
| 20% | Program Management and School Support | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning and evaluating the school counseling program ▪ Supporting school activities ▪ Professional Learning | All school stakeholders | Interactions with others: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Teachers ▪ Administrators ▪ Parents ▪ Counseling Teams, etc. |

Adapted from Gysbers, N.C. & Henderson, P. (2012)



2.1 Counseling within a Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) Framework

The Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) at Graded is a framework designed to provide targeted interventions and support based on students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs. The school counselor plays a crucial role within a Multi-Tiered System of Support (MTSS) by providing students with the appropriate level of academic, social-emotional, and behavioral support. Social-emotional and behavioral support within an MTSS framework includes a range of proactive and responsive strategies designed to meet the diverse needs of students at different levels of intervention, including:

Tier 1: Universal Supports includes universal interventions available to all students, such as:

- Leading school-wide social-emotional learning (SEL) programs.
- Developing and implementing school-wide behavior expectations with school leadership.
- Providing teacher and staff training on SEL strategies and mental health awareness.
- Leading conflict resolution and peer mediation.
- Organizing and/or supporting wellness and resilience-building initiatives.
- Supporting parent education workshops on SEL and student mental health.
- Assisting in the development of advisory curricula that integrate SEL principles.
- Transitioning students in and out of Graded and between school divisions.



Tier 2: Targeted Supports provides targeted support for students requiring additional assistance, such as:

- Small-group interventions and short-term counseling in which school counselors provide short-term individual and group counseling to address students' academic, social-emotional, and behavioral needs.

Tier 3: Intensive Supports involves intensive individualized support, which may include:

- Collaborative work with external support services to promote student well-being.
- Personalized student support and plans, such as behavior plans and SEL accommodation plans.
- Crisis intervention.

Counseling interventions are grounded in evidence-based techniques tailored to meet the unique needs of each student. Counselors collaborate with teachers, school leadership, and specialist support teams (OLS, ELL, and Intervention teams) to monitor student progress, provide interventions, and create an inclusive learning environment that meets the diverse needs of all learners. By integrating counseling services into the MTSS framework, Graded offers a structured, proactive, and data-driven approach to student support, reinforcing the commitment to student well-being and success.

Families

School counselors actively engage with families to build strong relationships that support student success. They facilitate regular communication with parents and guardians to provide updates on student progress, share strategies for social-emotional development, and offer guidance on navigating school-related challenges. Counselors also develop and lead workshops on topics such as mental health, well-being, and academic skills, offering families the necessary tools to support their children both at school and at home.

Teachers, OLS, ELL Specialists, and Intervention Specialists

Counselors work closely with homeroom, subject teachers, and advisors/mentors. The optional learning services (OLS) specialists, English language learning (ELL) specialists, and intervention specialists work to create a supportive learning environment that addresses students' academic, social, and emotional needs. They assist educators in implementing classroom strategies that foster student well-being, offer consultation on behavioral interventions, and provide guidance on differentiated instruction. Through student support meetings and multidisciplinary teams, counselors provide teachers with access to relevant resources and strategies to support students effectively.



School Leadership

School counselors collaborate closely with divisional associate principals and principals to address student concerns related to behavior management, academic progress, and social-emotional well-being. This partnership facilitates a proactive and student-centered approach to addressing challenges within the school environment.

In addition to daily operations, counselors work with the director of student support services (DSS) to shape programming, refine systems, and establish procedures and policies that enhance student support services. The DSS provides guidance on strategic initiatives, ensuring alignment with Graded's student support framework. Additionally, the DSS may offer expertise on specific student cases as needed, assisting in complex situations requiring additional resources or intervention.

2.2 Child Safeguarding

The SEL counseling team plays a vital role in Graded's Child Safeguarding Policy by championing the safety, well-being, and protection of all students. Counselors are key members of the Child Safeguarding Response Team (CSRT) and work in coordination with school leadership to monitor student safety and report any concerns about safeguarding.

Counselors are responsible for providing age-appropriate safeguarding education through Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) lessons and advisory programs, helping students develop self-advocacy skills and awareness of their rights. Additionally, they serve as a point of contact for students who may be experiencing harm or require support, ensuring that all cases are handled with confidentiality and professionalism.

In cases of suspected harm, abuse, or neglect, counselors follow mandated reporting procedures, ensuring all concerns are securely documented in the school's confidential safeguarding system. Counselors, with school leadership, conduct regular child safeguarding training for all staff and faculty so they are informed and aware of the school's CSG practices. Counselors participate in regular child safeguarding training to stay informed about best practices and legal responsibilities related to student protection.

2.3 Graded's Student Support Referral Process

Counselors collaborate with teachers, school leadership, and student support teams to offer students appropriate support through the Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) framework. Referrals to Optimal Learning Services (OLS), English language learning (ELL) specialists, and intervention specialists follow a structured process to provide a data-informed, collaborative approach to student success.



Tier 1: Universal Supports

- Teachers implement classroom-based strategies to support students struggling academically, socially, and/or behaviorally.
- If concerns persist despite using differentiated instruction and multiple strategies over time, a Student of Concern (SOC) form or referral is completed.
- Parents must be informed of the concerns before the SOC form is completed.
- The counselor, in conjunction with school leadership, will review the form and determine next steps, including whether to consult with a Graded specialist or gather feedback from other teachers.

Tier 2: Targeted Supports

- If additional support is required beyond classroom-based interventions, an Intervention Plan is developed using a structured template.
- The plan targets academic, behavioral, or social-emotional areas and includes specific strategies, progress monitoring, and timelines.
- Interventions are implemented and regularly reviewed to assess their effectiveness.
- If progress is insufficient, the case may be moved forward to a Student Support Team (SST) meeting for further review.



Tier 3: Intensive Supports

- If an intervention has been unsuccessful, an SST meeting is convened.
- The purpose of the SST meeting is to determine what additional services or accommodations are necessary for student success.
- Teachers present documented evidence of strategies implemented, interventions used, and student response data.
- The SST may recommend individualized support plans, including academic support plans, accommodation plans, behavioral plans, SEL accommodation plans, or referrals to external specialists.

By embedding the MTSS framework into the referral process, Graded provides student support that is collaborative, evidence-based, and aligned with the school's mission. By following this process, Graded ensures students receive equitable, data-driven support tailored to an individual student's needs.

3. External Specialists

There is a plethora of external specialists within the São Paulo community. Graded values working collaboratively with a student's specialist(s) to help meet their academic and social-emotional learning needs at school.

3.1 Referral to External Specialists

Referrals to external specialists (excluding confidential social-emotional/mental health referrals) are made through the SST process and must be based on SST team decisions with data-informed justifications. Any external referral (including confidential social emotional/mental health referrals) must be formalized in writing on school letterhead and shared with the family through school platforms (Google) or in person. Only SST members can write a referral for an external specialist. Once the evaluation is complete, the family submits it to the student's case manager, who may also be the counselor.

3.2 Evaluation from External Specialists

Families submit any non-referred external evaluations to the director of student support services (DSS). The following steps are taken to ensure equitable support provision within Graded's student support framework:

1. Initial Review: The evaluation is sent to the director of student support services (DSS). The DSS and the SEL counselor review the report and determine the next steps, including any necessary documentation. The SEL counselor logs the receipt of the report and files it in the student's folder.
2. Family Consultation: The DSS, SEL counselor, and lower school homeroom teacher (LS HRT) collaborate with the student's family to gather insights and explain the school's review process.

3. School-Based Review: If necessary, the SST team, including the SEL counselor, DSS, LS HRT, and other relevant staff (e.g., OLS or AP if applicable), reviews the evaluation and additional student data to determine whether there is a school-based need for support.
4. Outcome Discussion: The SEL counselor, DSS, and LS HRT meet with the family to share the school's decision regarding support or accommodations before engaging with any external specialists.
5. External Consultation (if needed): If deemed appropriate, the team may arrange a meeting with the external evaluator for further discussion.

At Graded, SST decisions are made based on professional expertise within the school and are not dictated by external specialists such as psycho-pedagogists, psychologists, speech therapists, medical doctors, or other private professionals. While external recommendations are considered, they are only implemented when the SST and school educators determine that they align with Graded's support framework and the student's needs. Family communications alone do not influence these decisions.

The SST and school educators hold the final authority on all student support decisions, including accommodations and modifications, even if external professionals provide differing recommendations. This authority is particularly relevant when addressing the needs of students with disabilities (federal law 13.146/2015), students with medical conditions (federal law 13.716/2018), and students requiring extraordinary support (federal law 14.254/2014).



4 Confidentiality & Data Protection

4.1 Student Confidentiality

Graded is committed to protecting student privacy while ensuring that information is disclosed only when it is necessary to support a student's well-being and academic

success, with the student's best interests at the center of all decisions. Counselors must uphold students' rights to privacy while balancing the need for transparency in collaboration with necessary school personnel. Counselors adhere to school policies and legal standards (e.g., Brazil's General Data Protection Law - LGPD) by securing student records and counseling notes. They use only school systems, such as CPOMS and Google, to store information and communicate about students. Confidentiality is a fundamental aspect of the counseling process. Information shared in counseling sessions is kept confidential, except when disclosing information is required by law or to prevent harm to oneself or others.



4.2 Requests for Student Information to and from External Specialists

A Consent to Receive and Release Information form *must* be signed by parents/guardians before any staff member can communicate with external specialists, such as psycho-pedagogists, psychologists, speech therapists, medical doctors, and other external specialists. This practice ensures compliance with confidentiality guidelines while enabling collaboration to support student success. Consent is not required for communication with tutors.

When an external specialist, such as a speech-language pathologist (SLP), psychologist, occupational therapist, or psycho-pedagogist (excluding tutors), contacts an educator, the student's social-emotional counselor must first verify that a Consent to Receive and Release Information form has been completed by the family. If this consent has not been

provided, the counselor will contact the family to request completion of the form before any communication can occur. Once the consent form is in place, the social-emotional counselor will authorize teachers to communicate with the external specialist or complete any requested forms. All communication with the specialist must include the counselor, whether by being copied in emails or invited to meetings. Additionally, efforts should be made to anonymize student data whenever possible to maintain confidentiality.

At Graded, we respect the valuable role specialists play in a student's development, and we recognize the importance of having a school-based perspective on a student's functioning. Due to data privacy and student confidentiality policies, we cannot allow specialists to visit and observe students directly. We are happy to assist by collecting relevant data for specialists using a rating scale, classroom observation checklist, or other templates.

5. Individualized Off-Campus Learning Plans

In rare and exceptional circumstances, a student may be unable to attend school for physical or mental health reasons. In these cases, an Individualized Off-Campus Learning Plan may be developed. This plan documents the learning expectations, the support provided during the student's absence, and the plan for re-entry. Approval must be given by both the Principal and the Director of Student Support Services.



References:

The following documents were used as guidance in the writing of this guide:

- **Graded's Guiding Statements** – Outlining the school's mission, vision, values, and Characteristics of a Graded Learner.
- **Graded's SOC Process & Intervention Guidelines** – Detailed framework for identifying and supporting students through structured interventions.
- **Graded Child Safeguarding Manual** – Comprehensive policies and procedures for child protection and safeguarding at Graded.
- **ASCA Ethical Standards** – Professional standards that inform the ethical practice of school counseling.
- **ISCA** - Annual Agreement, Professional Standards and Competencies, and website.
- **Student Support Services Procedures** – Policies and processes related to student referrals, interventions, and external evaluations.
- **Graded Confidentiality & Data Protection Guidelines**