

PUPIL COUNSELLING (Time to Talk) POLICY

NSPCC position on Independent School-based Counselling and Peer Support

Objectives

- To ensure that all children and young people have access to an independent counselling service in their school.
- To provide children and young people with choices about seeking support and increased opportunities to have 'someone to turn to' to enable them to talk about their problems, as well as to recognise the unique position of children and young people themselves in helping to provide such a service for others.

Promotion of Children's Rights

Independent school-based counselling and peer support promote the ideals set out in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in particular:

- Article 24 States Parties recognize the right of the child to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health and to facilities for the treatment of illness and rehabilitation of health. States Parties shall strive to ensure that no child is deprived of his or her right of access to such health care services.
- Article 12 States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.
- Article 28 States Parties recognize the right of the child to education, and with a view to achieving this right progressively and on the basis of equal opportunity, they shall, in particular: (e) Take measures to encourage regular attendance at schools and the reduction of drop-out rates.

Key points

Too many children and young people are unable to achieve their potential in life because of emotional and psychological problems. Furthermore, research now shows that children are forced to cope with a range of complex life issues including domestic violence, substance misuse and bullying. If these children are not supported and resources devoted to their emotional and social development, their intellectual development can also fall behind. If these problems remain unresolved, children may become de-motivated and disaffected, which could lead to their behaviour deteriorating in school.

The NSPCC believes that peer support schemes should be developed alongside school counselling services so that children have a choice about who they can seek support from.

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November 2017 1

Research and practice show us that many children and young people seek confidential support and advice from a variety of sources. Therefore, they should have access to both peer support services and school counselling services.

'If you don't want to tell anyone else you can tell her: Young people's views on school counselling' (British Journal of Guidance and Counselling, 35, pp. 97-114)

Peer support schemes and independent counselling could provide all children with 'someone to turn to' and ensure that young people have someone they can trust in school. The availability of 'someone to turn to' could help to counter the pressure of secrecy that abusers often place on children. Peer supporters can also sometimes offer unique perspectives on why their peers may be suffering and can often identify appropriate strategies to help them.

A 'whole school' approach

The most effective school counselling services and peer support schemes are those that are part of a 'whole school approach' to the issues addressed. This would involve working with the school to examine the context in which the scheme is being established and designing an appropriate scheme. It should meet the specific needs of the school and have the support of staff, governors, pupils and parents. It must also be within the capacity of the school to support and maintain the approach chosen in terms of resources and expertise available.

Schools need to be aware that school counselling services and peer support schemes require important initial groundwork as well as ongoing input if they are to be successful and sustainable. The following are some important considerations:

- School ethos: the school ethos should promote listening and mutual respect.
- Pastoral and curricular support: schools counselling services and peer support schemes need to be fully integrated into pastoral support systems, and also have reference to curricular and classroom activities and other programmes of work where applicable;
- Staff support: it is important that the majority of staff, including voluntary members and senior management, actively supports the scheme and service;
- Clarity is essential, about what needs the scheme and service will answer, what specific groups of pupils will be targeted, and what the scheme can and can't do;
- Resources: the school needs to be aware of what resources the service and scheme will require in order to be successful;
- Publicity: both staff and pupils should be aware of the existence of the service and scheme, its scope and limits, and how to access it;
- Training: consideration needs to be given to who does the training and what it will contain;
- Recruitment and selection: thought needs to be given to this as it is important that the peer supporters chosen are ones that the pupils would genuinely turn to. Pupils must also feel that they have ownership of the process or the scheme may not be used; and
- Support for the peer supporters: the peer supporters will need regular supervision with a member of staff to discuss how things are going and any problems that might arise and to pass on any concerns raised by pupils that are outside their remit. Relates to all of our work with schools not just peer support.

School-based counselling schemes for all children

The NSPCC considers that independent school-based counselling services must be available for all children in England and that this is the best way of ensuring that children are safeguarded and their welfare promoted. These counselling services should seek to address children and young people's needs by giving them access to an adult who can help them deal with their problems and give them the tools to help themselves and build their resilience and self-esteem. To ensure that all children are able to reach their full potential, we believe all children should be entitled to receive such services.

School counselling services seek to address children and young people's needs by giving them access to an adult who can help them deal with their problems and give them the tools to help themselves and build their resilience and self-esteem.

The opportunity to use such services must be available to all children and specific communication needs, including signing and communication techniques for children with learning disabilities should be available.

School counselling services must work within a multi-agency framework. They should operate alongside the school health service and the statutory and voluntary services that offer treatment and intervention, such as the child protection service, child and adolescent mental health services, sexual health clinics and family support services.

Befriending, 'buddying' or mentoring schemes may involve academic activities such as paired reading or pupil support, and are also sometimes set up to help pupils who are new to the school settle in. These schemes are much less formal than the other schemes and may only operate in the playground or in an after-school club.

'Time to Talk' at Newfield

Counsellor/Facilitators' Responsibilities

- To be first line contact in school when the need arises.
- To offer pupils individual or group time to talk/counselling.
- To liaise with the head teacher/deputy head teacher
- To liaise with parents and families where required to support pupil and family well-being
- To carry out training for staff in school to understand the role and purpose of counselling within the school setting
- To provide information on the counselling service, the role of the counsellor and a clear understanding of the contract of confidentiality with pupils.
- To advise staff whose role is to support pupils in emotional distress/ bereavement or who display behaviour that challenges.
- To develop, if appropriate, peer support schemes and other means of support based on counselling values and listening skills.
- To be a 'first point of contact' in school for post-incident counselling.

Head teacher/ Deputy Head Teacher Responsibilities

- To liaise with the designated counsellor/facilitator
- To liaise with class teachers, parents and LA support agencies if appropriate.
- To network and liaise with personnel from other agencies.
- To ensure Senior Leadership and Governors of the school are informed about the numbers who use the service and give a general overview of the data relating to the reasons for counselling (This data to be statistical only so that individuals concerned remain anonymous)

Where 'Time to Talk'/Counselling takes place

Time to Talk/Counselling provided by a counsellor/facilitator in school takes place during the day, on the school premises, in a quiet room where children and young people can feel safe and comfortable. Ideally the room is furnished in a way that creates an immediate distinction between the counselling room and a classroom.

Access to a confidential telephone line is also provided. A quiet room is an absolutely essential condition of operating the service. Interruptions must be kept to a minimum and a viewing window in the door or open door is advisable for the protection of the counsellor.

Counselling should adopt a 'person-centred' model, using open questions that do not imply 'blame'. This means they are usually led by the pupil, depending on the pupils' ability. However, when working with some pupils eg those with severe learning difficulties, some 'scaffolding' in the form of questions may be necessary.

Children and young people have the right to refuse or discontinue counselling at any time and it is the responsibility of the counsellor to ensure that the rights of autonomy are respected. Where possible, counselling for pupils should take place at a time outside of curriculum time e.g. pastoral times, break-time, before/after lessons, lunchtime, during assembly etc. However, if this is not possible the needs of the pupil should take precedence over 'taught time'.

There are guidelines as to what is the maximum amount of time that a counsellor should spend doing face-to-face counselling with pupils. The length of individual sessions can vary depending on the needs of the child or young person. The usual session time for counselling children and young people in schools is approximately 40 minutes. For pupils with complex difficulties this is reduced to 20 minutes but more frequently, to take account of individual needs.

Confidentiality and Safeguarding

Confidentiality is important to enable children and young people to express their views and perspective on any issue during the sessions in a non-judgemental framework. It is an essential element of the process if the relationship of trust is to develop between the counsellor/facilitator and the individual.

Counsellors working with children and young people with a learning disability may need to liaise with their parents. This needs to be done in consultation with the pupil. Counsellors working in

schools with children and young people are most effective when working in partnership with parents/carers who need to know about the counselling service that exists in the school.

The counsellor should take care to explain what 'confidentiality' means, if appropriate, and what conditions apply should the counsellor need to disclose the information under safeguarding/child protection circumstances (see Safeguarding/Child Protection Policy). Whilst it is acknowledged that confidentiality is crucial to individuals, in safeguarding circumstances it cannot be an absolute right.

In the case of a potential child protection concern, events may develop that could lead to the counsellor considering their duty to disclose to the Designated Senior Person (DSP) in the interest of the child or young person's safety. This only relates to those occasions when the counsellor has strong grounds for thinking that an individual might be at 'risk of significant harm from others or themselves'. Such a breach of confidentiality should not extend to other areas of the individual's present or past life that are not relevant to the situation. Thought should be given as to whether historical abuse has implications for the safety of the child concerned and also any other children. Counsellors should ensure that they have a clear understanding of the procedures for referral to the DSP. Counsellors working with young abused clients who may be required to give evidence in court about the abuse are advised to liaise with the Crown Prosecution Service.

Time to Talk/Counselling Facilitators

Only trained counsellors are permitted to formally facilitate 'Time to Talk' sessions with pupils. The current school counsellor has completed a 1 year Level 3 Advanced Counselling Skills course and 4 ½ years Childline training; she is also a member of BACP and has a Foundation degree in Counselling. As well as an immediate response service which can be operated as the needs arises, there are weekly timetabled sessions provided for on-going or recurring issues or concerns which allow individual pupils time to discuss in private. These sessions run alongside the PSHE/person centred curriculum activities which form an essential core of teaching and learning throughout the school.

A referral for counselling should be made if:

- a pupils' behaviour is out of character (i.e has marked mood swings, or is becoming subdued or over excited e.t.c)
- a pupil bullies others, or is a victim of bullying behaviour
- a pupil has difficulties due to family breakdown/domestic violence
- a pupil has peer group difficulties/relationships
- a pupil has school refusal difficulties/poor attendance record
- a pupil has been bereaved, suffered loss or separation or experienced trauma in their lives
- a pupil self harms, e.g. cutting, scratching, biting.
- a pupil has developed low self-esteem
- a pupil is known, or suspected of being sexually, physically or emotionally abused either presently or in their past
- a pupil's standard of work is dropping dramatically