

Guidelines for Student Counselling at Parnell District School

Guidance and counselling- The requirements:

Section 77 of the Education Act 1989 requires all principals of state schools to take all reasonable steps to ensure that all students get good guidance and counselling. This implies that behavioural matters that may lead to stand-down or suspension have previously been acted on in other ways by the school. They also need to ensure that parents are told of matters that are preventing or slowing a child's progress through school, or are harming a child's relationship with teachers or other students.

If a child is stood down or suspended from school, the principal must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the student has the guidance and counselling that are reasonable and practicable in all the circumstances of the stand-down or suspension. If a child's suspension is subject to conditions, the principal must take all reasonable steps to ensure that an appropriate educational programme is provided to the student. This is to help the child return to school and minimise the negative effect on learning of the suspension.

WHY COUNSELLING?

- Counselling is available at Parnell District School as part of the pastoral care and support the school offers to its students. The school however, does not employ a trained counsellor, but has a number of staff members with valuable life experience who can point students and families to professional help if necessary.
- Teachers can be the first port of call and will refer on in many instances for on going help. Students may have difficulties with work commitments, stress, depression, bereavement, consideration of self harm, being bullied (physical, verbal, text or cyber), sexuality issues, contact with drugs/alcohol, theft, coping with family tensions and change or even times of positive personal development which may prompt students to seek counselling, or their carers to recommend it. Many of these will require the assistance of professional counsellors and are beyond the expertise of the school staff.
- Although a whole range of issues, may present themselves the overall aim is **to support and promote the well-being of the students in the School's care.**

WHO ARE THE COUNSELLORS?

The senior teachers in the school also have a duty of pastoral care to all students. They are:

- Gary Cain, Wendy Franklin-Smith, Anne Turner, Sue Parkinson, Sue McRae, Linda Brett, Stacy McIvor, Karlos Bosson, Sarah Figgins, Michelle Simpson, Helen Grant or Gianluca Watson (ESOL students). Other teachers should refer students/ families to these people.

WHEN?

- Students or parents should make an appointment to see the teacher of their choice at a mutually suitable time.

WHERE?

- Any discussions will take place in a private room, with consideration being given to not placing a child totally alone with a teacher. (i.e. near a window/door.

REFERRALS may come in a variety of ways:

Self-referral by the student:

- These may take place in two ways:
 1. Students may approach a senior teacher **in person** or by note.
 2. Students can also make an appointment by seeing the School Office *It needs to be emphasised that this will be arranged on an entirely confidential basis,* informing no other member of staff, including other counsellors, or student that such an arrangement is being made.

Referral by the Head of Year or Syndicate Leader:

- The Syndicate Leaders may refer students for counselling in one of several ways:
 1. Through liaison with Mrs Simpson, or Mr Cain who will either see the student herself/ himself or make arrangements for him to see a professional counsellor.
 2. Through liaison with the School Public Health Nurse, who may seek help from the Family Court or a private counsellor
 3. By encouraging the student to self-refer.
- The student's preferences over which of the senior teachers they see, needs to be paramount, and whoever has the first discussion with the student about counselling should raise the question of which member of the senior teaching team (s)he would most like to see. For certain matters including discussions of sexuality, same sex counselling is probably preferable. Students should be given time to think about this and the opportunity to change their minds both prior to the counselling beginning, and, with proper discussion, after an initial session or two with the first choice of senior teacher.

Referral by parents:

- Parents may contact the senior staff at the School, requesting that their child should have counselling. Our preference is to suggest that parents should

encourage their child to self-refer, or at least to see a senior teacher to discuss the possibility of counselling.

- **In all circumstances, the counselling should only begin on a voluntary basis, with the student's unforced consent.**
- Counselling can form part of a support package, discussed and agreed with student and his parents as an aid through difficult times, for example involving behavioural or attitudinal problems.
- Counselling may be *prescribed* as part of a disciplinary package in which a student's place at the School is in part dependent upon them receiving counselling or upon the results of the counselling, however it is more productive with pupil's unforced consent.

CONFIDENTIALITY

- Some of the issues concerning this have already been covered.
- The senior teachers *can* promise confidentiality to their students, *within certain (legal/ safety) considerations*.
- The position regarding confidentiality will be clarified with the student at the beginning of the counselling process.
- The only occasion when a Counsellor would break confidentiality is where the student indicates that he or another person is at risk or in danger. It should be emphasised that such a breach should only take place in consultation with the student, unless extreme circumstances necessitate otherwise. Such breaches of confidence are very rare indeed.

INFORMING PARENTS

- Normally the school will wish to keep an open dialogue with the parents or our students and will probably encourage students to discuss their concerns with their parents. Normally we would seek the pupil's consent to disclose or sit with them while they disclosed to their parents.
- However if disclosure to parents is perceived by the child as likely to bring harm to themselves or others, and the child is too frightened to disclose, the school will look at the involvement of CYPS. Staff reserve the right not to inform parents if they deem that the particular circumstances warrant this; but it is likely that this will be highly unusual.
- When parents are informed, this will be undertaken by the student's syndicate leader or principal, rather than directly by the senior teacher. *It is generally felt that direct contact between the Counselling senior teacher and the parents is undesirable, certainly without the student's permission being given.* This is to avoid the counselling relationship of trust being undermined. Where contact does take place, it should always be remembered and made clear, that the student, not the parent is the client, and that the senior teacher thus has the need and right to maintain confidentiality. If such conversations do take place without prior discussion of this with the student, the matter should be discussed with the student at the earliest opportunity following the event.

RECORD-KEEPING

- Senior teachers will keep a formal record of students seen, which may include brief mention of types of problems discussed.
- Although students are legally entitled to see such records relating to themselves, and although there might be circumstances in which it might be desirable for members of the counselling team to have access to records relating to a particular student, such records will normally be treated as discreet and confidential.
- Such formal records are in addition to any private case notes which the senior teachers may make confidentially for *aide memoire* purposes and should be destroyed when the child leaves the school. These may be in the teacher's planner for example.

LIAISON BETWEEN COUNSELLORS AND OTHER STAFF

- The ethos of trust that has characterised the arrangements for counselling has been found to greatly help both the counselling process itself, and the degree to which counselling has played a successful role within pastoral care at the School.
- This has involved and will continue to involve recognition that Counsellors should not be required or expected to disclose confidential information to senior staff departing from the rules of confidentiality set out above.
- However, this does not preclude Counsellors being consulted or involved in discussions about the most appropriate forms of support and response to students' pastoral or behavioural difficulties. Counsellors may be able to contribute valuably to these processes without disclosing confidential information.

APPENDIX – staff with counselling backgrounds: (Please add details)

Gary Cain – one Masters counselling paper/ one thesis: Intermediate School Counselling.

Gianluca Watson

Sue P – experience with Anglican Women's Trust

Karlos – experience and has Youth Worker Qualification

Sue Lyons

Sue MacCrae – Special Ed certificate.

Michelle Simpson - SENCO