

Policy Name	Student Counselling Policy
Department	Student Services
Created by	Student Achievement and Wellbeing Manager
Date Reviewed	June 2021
Date of Next Review	June 2024
Equality Impact Assessment	<p>This policy has been reviewed in line with the Equality Act 2010 which recognises the following categories as Protected Characteristics: Age, Disability, Gender Reassignment, Marriage and Civil Partnership, Pregnancy and Maternity, Race, Religion and Belief, Sex (gender) and Sexual orientation. We will continue to monitor this policy to ensure that it provides equal access and does not discriminate against anyone, especially any person/s listed under any protected characteristic. <i>(insert date of EIA)</i></p>

1. Purpose

1.1 The Bedford College Group is committed to supporting students and recognises the importance of a student's health and wellbeing in relation to his or her academic progression. The purpose of this policy is to outline the scope of the Counselling Service which is provided by qualified Counsellors at the Bedford College Group. Counselling is intended to provide support and/or intervention (practical or therapeutic) in order to enhance student well-being and/or academic progress.

2. Scope

2.1 The College is committed to support student wellbeing and recognises that a positive approach to the management of physical and mental health. The policy applies to all current students studying at the Bedford College Group and wanting to access counselling support. The counselling service provides students with support at a time when they are most vulnerable and aims to contain the distress of vulnerable students. However, the counselling service cannot take responsibility for all mental health issues arising in the College and will work together with other key staff to support students in distressing situations. Counsellors also liaise with external agencies and maintain links with these to support the wellbeing of students. These may include GPs, local counselling services and community mental health teams.

3. Principles

3.1. Students will have access to a confidential counselling from a dedicated, professional Counsellor who adhere to the BACP ethical framework. In order to encourage the achievement of full potential, counselling addresses personal mental and physical health issues as well as specific learning issues with the intended result that, where a student seeks or is referred for counselling, the student's success and enjoyment of the academic experience will also be improved.

4. Entitlement to counselling

4.1. The Counselling Service is available to all students of The Bedford College Group. However, in order to maintain professional and ethical boundaries, students who also work at the College, including as an apprentice, should access the Workforce Wellness EAP programme for counselling

4.2 It is not recommended that where a student is already accessing specialist therapeutic support outside of College that they commence another form of therapy/counselling until the support has ended due to a conflict in therapies.

4.3 The Service is not available to students on counselling courses who are seeking a specific number of hours of personal therapy for assessment purposes only. However, students on those courses who are in need of counselling support are entitled to the same level of service as all other students.

4.4 The Counselling Service operates during term-time. Students seeking counselling during the College holidays are referred to appropriate external agencies.

4.5 The service modality is integrative with person-centred at the core. We strongly believe that the person-centred approach is crucial for forming and maintaining a therapeutic relationship. Counsellors can bring in other modalities they are trained in, for example Psychodynamic and CBT.

4.6 Students will initially be offered 6 sessions of therapy with the option to extend to 12 sessions. Unfortunately due to high demand and waiting lists, we are unable to extend sessions beyond the 12 sessions however we will work with the student to support any onward referral for support.

5. Referrals and Interventions

5.1 The Counselling Service offers the following:

- One-to-one therapeutic counselling by appointment
- Drop-in sessions for students wanting to see a counsellor at short notice and for a short time
- Mediation between students
- Risk assessment support for safeguarding team when students are experiencing a mental health crisis
- Consultations with teaching and support staff to support them in their roles

5.2 Referrals to the Counsellor may be recommended/initiated by:

- Self-referral
- Teaching staff or Personal Achievement Tutor
- Designated safeguarding team
- A registered medical, social care or health practitioner

5.3 All staff that are making referrals, should use Promonitor confidential comments to make the referral to the Counsellor. Once the referral has been received, the Counselling Coordinator will aim to make contact with the student within 5 working days to arrange an initial assessment. Appointments may be offered with the Counselling Coordinator in person, by text, telephone, email or through online platforms such as Skype for Business and Microsoft Teams

5.4 All initial assessments are carried out by the Counselling Coordinator to ensure an experienced practitioner has knowledge and understanding of student issues, presenting behaviours, student remits, limitations of proficiency, ethics, safety, and signposting on if it is evident that the student will benefit from a more specialist support due to the severity/complexity of their issues. Paperwork utilised to assess the students presenting behaviour is:

- Student Referral/Assessment form
- CORE 10
- Risk assessment (if needed)

5.5 Students will be placed on a waiting list and the allocation of a qualified counsellor or trainee counsellor is by the Coordinator based upon the counsellor's own knowledge and experience being mindful of students issues and limitations of proficiency. If a student is accepted into the service and is considered high risk they will receive priority status to work with the Counselling Coordinator or be referred to their GP or CAMHS. The Coordinator will also provide holding/drop in sessions with priority students to provide an ongoing risk assessment until the necessary sessions can commence.

5.6 All trainee counsellors will contract with their student on the first session, 2 copies of the contract are provided within the referral paperwork to enable the counsellor/student to sign both, each retaining a copy. In line with GDPR, it is essential that counsellors check the information within the referral paperwork relating to the student is correct and

amend/omit/change as necessary. If 6 weeks has passed since the initial assessment was completed, trainee counsellors will re-assess utilising the CORE 10 form to ensure accurate scores and evidenced based practice is adopted.

5.7 Counselling sessions normally last up to 50 minutes and students normally attend on a weekly basis however these may move to a fortnightly basis depending on the student's level of support needed. Wherever possible, students will arrange their sessions outside of class times. If attendance during class time is unavoidable, they must seek permission from their tutor prior to commencing counselling.

5.8 During the Covid-19 pandemic, the safety of staff and students is our priority. Where it is felt that face to face sessions cannot be offered in a safe environment, the sessions will be delivered using other secure channels such as phone, email and online platforms such as Skype for Business and Microsoft Teams. The sessions will be offered during the normal College hours and counsellors will agree the method of communication prior to contracting and therapy commencing

5.9 The cancellation policy is explained to students at the assessment stage and again when contracting. Students must inform the Coordinator if they are unable to attend a session. If a student misses 2 sessions with or without contact their sessions will be cancelled and the next student on the waiting list fills the space. In exceptional circumstances, students will be offered an additional chance to attend their counselling session after the 2 missed appointments.

6. Professional practice and standards

6.1 Students are entitled to expect a high quality therapeutic counselling service which:

- is student-focused
- is delivered by appropriately qualified counsellors abides by the BACP Ethical Framework and The Bedford College Group policies and procedures.

6.2 The service is provided by trainee counsellors and the Counselling Coordinator to work with students. Trainees are mentored by a College Counselling Coordinator to ensure they are supported in their roles, as well as having external professional supervision through their clinical supervisor at least once a month

6.3 All counsellors are required to have a minimum qualification of a Level 4 Diploma in Counselling and are committed to maintaining their competence through on-going professional development. Trainee counsellors will be completing the final year of their qualification and will have already completed some of their client hours. All Counsellors are required to be a member of a professional body such as The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy.

6.4 To fulfil the requirements of the BACP Ethical Framework (2018) counsellors must participate in continuous professional development, which may include attendance at training courses, workshops, conference or professional networking. For those counsellors working with young people, counsellors are required to complete additional CPD in core competences for work with young people

6.5 It is the trainee Counsellors responsibility to source CPD for themselves. This may be in discussion with the Counselling Coordinator or their clinical supervisor. However, The

Bedford College Group will provide regular Safeguarding update training to ensure trainees are working in line with the Colleges safeguarding policies

7. Confidentiality

7.1 Counselling sessions are confidential to the student. Unless they have the student's prior consent, the counsellor will not pass on to a third party any information regarding a student's attendance, their presenting issues or their ongoing issues. However, ProMonitor is updated stating that the student is or is not attending counselling, the students are made aware of this during the assessment

7.2 The BACP Ethical Framework (2018) requires that counsellors offer the highest possible levels of confidentiality in order to respect the student's privacy and create the trust necessary for counselling. This includes when sessions are offered via telephone and online platforms such as Skype for Business and Microsoft Teams

7.3 For ethical and legal reasons, counsellors cannot offer absolute confidentiality to their students. The confidentiality policy is explained to the student in their initial contracting session when the student is asked to sign the confidentiality agreement before any disclosures are made and therapy commences.

7.4 In exceptional circumstances the counsellor may take the decision to break confidentiality, with or without the student's consent, if necessary where in his/her professional judgement if:

- there is a risk of the student seriously harming themselves or being harmed
- there is a risk of another person being harmed (children and vulnerable adults)
- there is a risk of a serious crime being committed. Serious crime including: anything under the Road Traffic Act 1988 which includes drink and drug driving, money laundering, drug trafficking, human trafficking.
- The student is using drugs or alcohol on campus or being on campus intoxicated putting themselves and others in potential danger.

7.5 In the above circumstances, a risk assessment is completed and if a high risk is assessed, the counsellor refers to a designated safeguarding member of staff. Counsellors will always seek to obtain the student's specific consent in writing, prior to disclosure. However, we can also act without written consent if necessary.

7.6 All College counsellors are trained in safeguarding. When responding to an allegation of abuse, or when suspecting a child or vulnerable adult is or has been suffering significant harm, counsellors abide by the College Safeguarding Policy and Procedures.

7.7 In rare circumstances, the Counsellors may be required to disclose information from counselling case notes to outside authorities e.g. Police. Any disclosure of confidential information will be restricted to relevant information and we will always seek your written consent first,

8. Storage of Student data/notes

8.1 Trainee Counsellors will hold hard copies of student referral paperwork within their files, completing weekly session sheets and 6 weekly CORE 10 forms. Student data and

student notes are kept in separate locked filing cabinets within the office to ensure student information is not identified. Once a student has ended their record is stapled together and locked in a filing cabinet for 3 academic years.

8.2 Looked after children or in the event of a student death, data will be stored for a minimum of 75 years.

8.3 All student notes/data is the property of The Bedford College Group. Students are able to put in a Subject Access Request whereby we have to provide the student their record within 30 days of receiving the request. The student also has a right to request their record is destroyed when counselling comes to an end.

8.4 Any notes or records kept on personal or work laptops will be password protected and encrypted to ensure student confidentiality and compliance with the GDPR. No student data will be shared or sessions will take place over insecure networks/channels.

9. Monitoring and evaluation

The counselling service is evaluated annually as part of the College's self-assessment process, in line with the Ofsted common inspection framework, and draws on:

- statistical data collected monthly on levels of service take-up
- anonymised student data reflecting the profile of service users and presenting issues
- a review form used at the start and end of the counselling process to monitor distance travelled by the student during their counselling
- evaluation forms given to students to complete anonymously at the end of their counselling
- information on levels of awareness of the service collected through cross-College surveys and focus groups.

10. Complaints procedure

11.1 A student may make a complaint about a counsellor by following the grievance procedure for students which is set out in the student handbook and is available on the College website.

11.2 A student may also register a complaint online via the 'Have Your Say' section of Moodle.

11.3 A grievance against a counselling member of staff is referred to the Quality department who will initiate the investigation so that the complaint can be fully investigated and to decide an outcome

11.4 Students who are not satisfied with the outcome of the complaint investigation may appeal and details of how to do this and the relevant timescales are set out in the decision letter.

11.5 If still dissatisfied, a student may contact the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) who will start a professional conduct procedure. A copy of this procedure is available in the BACP Ethical Framework. The professional conduct procedure may only be activated after all local procedures have been implemented.

12. Supporting policies and procedures

This policy should be read in conjunction with:

- BACP Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions 2018
- Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy
- Data Protection Policy
- Single Equality Scheme
- Have Your Say policy (Praise, Suggestions and Complaints)
- Confidentiality procedures
- Fitness to Study policy