

AHBS School Counselling Policy

1. Purpose and Aim

The counselling department at AHBS aims to enhance the school's pastoral provision by offering additional emotional and psychological support to students who may benefit from working with a professional counsellor.

This confidential service promotes students' social, emotional and mental well-being, enabling them to thrive both personally and academically.

2. Services Provided

The school counsellor provides the following services:

- Individual counselling sessions for students in a confidential setting,
- Small-group wellbeing programmes addressing topics such as friendship, self-esteem, mindfulness, transition to secondary school and emotional regulation.
- Meetings with staff and families to discuss student concerns and provide guidance as needed.
- Drop-in sessions for students requiring immediate emotional support.
- Reporting child protection or safeguarding concerns, in line with school policy.
- Consulting and liaising with internal and external professionals and agencies to support student welfare.

3. Common Areas of Support

Students may access counselling for a range of issues including but not limited to:

- Anxiety or stress
- Family or relationship difficulties
- Friendship and peer-related concerns
- Emotional regulation and coping strategies
- Social isolation
- Grief or loss
- Transition or adjustment challenges

4. Limitations of School Counselling

While school counselling plays a vital role in supporting students' emotional wellbeing, it is important for staff and families to understand its limitations:

Short-Term Focus:

School Counselling is intended as a short-term, solution-focused service designed to help students manage challenges that impact their school life (e.g. anxiety, friendship issues, or transitions). It is not a substitute for long-term or intensive therapy.

Limited Scope:

School counsellors cannot diagnose mental health conditions or provide clinical treatment for complex or severe mental health issues such as major depression, trauma or psychiatric disorders.

Capacity Constraints:

Due to the nature of the school environment, counsellors have limited capacity and may not be able to provide extended or ongoing weekly sessions. When longer-term or more frequent support is required, families will be advised to seek external professional help.

5. Consent

The counsellor will, whenever possible, seek parental consent and collaborate with families to support students who may be struggling. However, the following guidelines apply:

- Primary Students: Written parental or guardian consent is required before counselling sessions begin.
- Secondary Students: Students who demonstrate sufficient understanding and maturity may access counselling independently without parental consent.
- Drop-in Sessions: Parental consent is not required for informal, unstructured interactions (e.g. spontaneous conversations).
- Best Interest of the Student: Where it is deemed in the student's best interest to access support without parental consent, the counsellor may proceed.
- Safeguarding Concerns: If a parent refuses consent and the school determines that counselling is necessary to prevent potential harm, the case may be referred to Child Protection specialists as possible neglect.

6. Confidentiality

Counselling sessions are confidential. However, the counsellor must operate within school safeguarding policies and professional ethical standards. This means confidentiality may be broken if there is concern for the safety or welfare of a student.

Confidentiality will be breached only when:

- The student discloses that they are being harmed or at risk of harm.
- The student discloses intent to harm another person.

- The student expresses intent to harm themselves.

When disclosure is necessary, the counsellor will, where appropriate, inform the student of the need to share information and will ensure it is handled sensitively and only with relevant staff or agencies.

7. Referral Process

Referral by Staff:

Staff who have concern about a student's emotional well-being should complete the [Staff Counselling Referral Form](#).

Referral by Parents:

Parents or guardians can refer their child by completing the [Parent Counselling Referral Form](#).

Referral by Students:

Students may self-refer using the [Student Self-Referral Form](#).

Once a referral is received and it is determined that counselling would be beneficial:

- The counsellor reviews the referral form.
- A brief meeting may be held with relevant adults to gather background information.
- If appropriate, the student is recommended for counselling.
- Parental consent is obtained for primary students (secondary students may self-consent).
- The student is added to the counselling schedule or waiting list, based on priority.
- Sessions are arranged,
- Upon completion, a closure session is held, and parents or staff are informed where appropriate.

8. External Professional Support

When a student's needs exceed the capacity or scope of school counselling, external professional intervention may be necessary.

A referral to external mental health services will be recommended when:

- The student's difficulties require specialist therapy or clinical diagnosis.
- Long-term or intensive intervention is needed.
- The family requests external or private support.

The school counsellor can provide parents with information about appropriate services and professionals within the community. Parents are responsible for making final decisions regarding



external support. This collaborative approach ensures that students receive the most effective and comprehensive care possible.

9. Mental Health Support Undertaking (Disclaimer)

Parents/guardians are required to sign a *Mental Health Support Undertaking* to acknowledge their understanding of the school's recommendations and their commitment to supporting the child's mental health needs.

Failure to seek or engage with recommended external support may be regarded as a **safeguarding concern**, in accordance with the AHBS safeguarding policy.