

AHBS Guide to the School Counselling and Mental Health Services

The counselling department aims to build on the school's pastoral provision by offering additional emotional support to students who may benefit from the opportunity to work with a professional counsellor. This confidential service helps promote the social, emotional and mental well-being of students, enabling them to make the most of the opportunities offered for their social and academic development.

Services provided

- Providing a psychological counselling service for vulnerable students in an education environment by working in a confidential setting, supporting students, families, and school staff.
- Well-being programs, in small groups, covering a range of areas such as friendship issues, self-esteem, transition to secondary, mindfulness, and parenting workshops.
- Meeting with staff and families in relation to student concerns and difficulties as appropriate.
- Providing an open-door policy for 'drop-in' sessions as needed.
- Reporting child protection concerns when required.
- Consulting and liaising with internal and external professionals and agencies.

Sample of types of problems brought to counselling:

- Anxiety
- Family/relationship issues
- Friendship or peer-related concerns
- Emotional regulation and coping strategies
- Isolation
- Grief/loss
- Stress
- Transition

Limitations of School Counselling

While the school counselling service plays a vital role in the pastoral and emotional support offered to students, it is important for both staff and families to recognize certain limitations:

1. **Short-Term Focus:** School counselling is primarily designed for short-term interventions that help students navigate specific challenges affecting their school life, such as

anxiety, stress, friendship issues, and transitions. It is not a substitute for long-term or intensive mental health treatment.

2. **Limited Scope:** Although school counsellors are equipped to handle common school-related concerns, they are unable to address more complex mental health issues such as severe depression, trauma, or conditions necessitating clinical diagnosis, psychiatric care, or medication.
3. **Capacity Constraints:** Due to the demands of the school environment, counsellors may have limited time to devote to each student, making it difficult to provide ongoing, weekly sessions over extended periods. When more frequent or longer-term support is necessary, the school counsellor will recommend external services.
4. **Confidentiality Boundaries:**

Confidentiality:

Counselling sessions are confidential. However, school counsellors operate within child protection policies and educational guidelines, which may require them to share certain information with staff or parents if safeguarding concerns arise. This approach may differ from the confidentiality practices found in external professional therapy.

There are three situations where confidentiality will be breached, as per child protection protocol:

- The student discloses that they are being hurt by someone.
- The student discloses they want to hurt someone else.
- The student discloses they want to hurt themselves.

Making a Referral to the School Counsellor

1. **Referral by Staff:** Where you have a concern that a student is experiencing some form of psychological distress, please complete the [Staff counselling referral form](#).
2. **Referral by Parents:** Parents can directly refer their children by completing the [Parent referral form](#)
3. **Referral by Self:** Students can self-refer to seek out counselling support using the Student [Self-Referral Form](#)

Once it is determined that the student may benefit from counselling, the counsellor will send a parental consent form (for primary school students) or allow secondary school students to provide their own informed consent. The number of sessions per student will depend on each case.

Referral Pathways Flowchart:

1. Person with a concern
2. Complete School Counsellor Staff, Parent Referral or Self-Referral Form

3. Referral Form reviewed by Counsellor
4. Meet with relevant adult to gain further insight
5. Recommend for counselling, if suitable
6. Obtain written consent from parent (primary students only)
7. Add student to school counsellor schedule and assign to priority or waiting list
8. Arrange sessions with the student
9. Closure session with student and inform parent or teacher as suitable

The Importance of Seeking External Professional Support

When a student's mental health needs surpass the capacity of school counselling, it is crucial to pursue external professional support.

The school counsellor may recommend a referral to external mental health professionals when:

- A student's needs exceed the scope of the school counselling service.
- There is a requirement for specialized therapy or diagnosis.
- The family seeks more intensive, long-term mental health support.

The school counsellor can assist in this process by providing information about suitable services and professionals in the local community to parents, who must then make an informed decision based on the specific needs of their child. This collaboration ensures that families are empowered to seek the most appropriate and effective support for their child's mental health and well-being.

Disclaimer: Mental Health Support Undertaking

Parents/guardians will be required to sign a Mental Health Support Undertaking to acknowledge their understanding and commitment to supporting their child's mental health needs. If parents/guardians choose not to seek the recommended support for their child, this may be classified as a safeguarding concern in accordance with the AHBS Safeguarding Policy.