



# Merchant Taylors' School

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## Counselling Policy and Procedures

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Author: Senior School Counsellor

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## Statement

Merchant Taylors' Counselling Service is designed to complement the existing pastoral, PSHE, Cornerstone, mental health and emotional wellbeing offer to Merchant Taylors' students.

The Counselling Service aims to promote autonomy and, as far as possible, provides enough guidance and information for students to make their own choices and decisions regarding counselling. This includes involving parents in counselling, provided this is consistent with the best interests of the student concerned.

Students have the right to confidentiality in counselling, which is essential for maintaining trust with the counsellor, however counsellors accept that confidentiality is not absolute and safeguarding all students must always be at the forefront of their work.

In line with nationally agreed standards, the Senior School Counsellor, School Counsellor and Associate Counsellor/s have an enhanced DBS check and are also bound by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) Ethical Framework for Good Practice. You can view this here: [http://www.bacp.co.uk/ethical\\_framework/](http://www.bacp.co.uk/ethical_framework/)

## Aims and Objectives of this Policy

To ensure all involved adults have a shared understanding of the counselling service at Merchant Taylors' and that they respect the rights and importance of students participating in counselling on a voluntary basis. This includes, parents and guardians, pastoral care, teaching staff and adults involved with external organisations. This approach values the child/young person and respects their right to be informed and involved in decisions concerning themselves, in line with Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Counselling should not be used as a behavioural corrector or punishment, nor should a student be sent to counselling because, crucially, it is a choice-led service.

## Parental Involvement

Using the Gillick Competency principle young people aged 16 and under have the right to access counselling confidentially, without parental consent, provided they are capable of understanding the process of counselling. A condensed version of Frazer guidelines - [see Appendix 1](#), will be considered along with pastoral/teacher feedback, if necessary, so as to ascertain if Gillick competent. If a student is thought not to be Gillick competent, written consent will be sought from their parent/guardian and the student will be kept informed throughout this process.

However, in the pursuit of providing the best support for students, all counsellors' will pursue parental awareness/knowledge of attendance, unless this is detrimental to engagement or the therapeutic alliance, but importantly not detrimental to safeguarding processes.

## The Role of a School Counsellor

For the definition of counselling, please see [Appendix 2](#)

Counselling at Merchant Taylors' is an onsite or virtual response to those students needing additional support with their emotional needs, for example, with managing a family

breakdown, bereavement, loss, family and peer relationship difficulties, anxiety, low-mood and bullying.

The aim is to provide a safe, confidential and non-judgemental space for students to connect and identify with their inner resources, grow in their resilience, self-awareness and confidence.

Counselling support is reviewed at week 4, which helps guide if continued support is required, the best hopes of the remaining sessions and if an external agency referral is required.

The sessions will run weekly for 50 minutes and will alternate on a given day so as to ensure that a student does not regularly miss the same lesson with the counselling team aiming to be sensitive to the timetabling of core subjects.

## Pastoral provision and confidentiality

In order to monitor student engagement and provide a robust response to pastoral provision, the names of students attending will be held centrally by the Assistant Heads Pastoral at MTGS and MTBS. The subject matter of what particular students discuss will not be disclosed and the Assistant Heads Pastoral will not reveal to any parent that their child is attending counselling, without first seeking authorisation from the student.

The Assistant Heads Pastoral will liaise with the counsellor over any concerns regarding the well-being of learners who are currently receiving counselling; any relevant child protection issues; appointments; referrals and waiting lists for school learners; and any other issue, which may impact the provision of counselling.

Due to the nature of having to monitor attendance, subject teachers need to be informed of particular student's leaving class to attend counselling sessions, therefore anonymity cannot be given. However, as with above, confidentiality surrounding what is spoken about is paramount and will be adhered to at all times.

A student may choose to request that the counsellor inform specific staff members (pastoral support or teaching staff) that they are having a difficult time in order to feel more supported. In these instances, the counsellor will only discuss what has been asked of them and what they have been given permission from the student to discuss.

Lastly, themes presented in counselling will be discussed with the Assistant Heads Pastoral and Heads of PSHE in the pursuit of contributing towards the PSHE and wellbeing offer at Merchant Taylors'.

## Student access

Students can self-refer by emailing the Senior School Counsellor, who will then aim to respond within 48 hours and will thereafter assign to their own, the School Counsellor or Associate Counsellors' caseload.

Details of how to access counselling can be found on notice boards at both the senior school sites, on the Counselling Firefly Page and on posters detailing why a student might want counselling and how to access it, in various 'hot spot' areas.

Additionally, teachers or parents can refer by emailing the Senior School Counsellor and their details can be found on the school website and on Firefly.

There is a need for discretion and confidentiality to be observed as much as possible and respect for the young person's right to privacy. Therefore, professionals, school staff, or other people involved should take note that discussions with others regarding the referral should only take place on a need-to-know basis and, importantly, with the young person's permission.

Once a referral has been received, the designated counsellor will meet with the student and through an initial meeting, will ascertain if school counselling is the best provision of support.

### Associate Counsellors

Associate counsellors are aspiring counsellors attending a BACP accredited University Counselling course and they will have successfully been signed off as 'fit for practice' before starting placement at Merchant Taylors'. They will provide one-to-one sessions with clients aged 16+, once a week for up to 50 minutes and will review progress at week 4.

Associate counsellors are regularly supervised by their University and also have external clinical supervision ensuring safe practice is adhered to along with monthly line management supervision from the Senior School Counsellor. Additionally, they will take part in monthly team meetings to discuss their practice.

Associate counsellors wishing to use clients for written case studies for university assessments, need to discuss the matter with the Senior School Counsellor and the relevant Assistant head Pastoral before any consent from the client can be given.

### Other Professionals

Counselling from the School Counselling team will not be given to students accessing therapeutic support from any other provision, so as to reduce potential conflicts of therapeutic effort, for example, CAMHS, private practice or the Venus Centre.

### Supervision

The Senior School Counsellor and School Counsellor engage in monthly clinical supervision with an external clinical supervisor to maintain and monitor standards and to comply with BACP ethical guidance.

The Associate Counsellor also has monthly external clinical supervision and weekly group supervision from their respective university so as to monitor the placement provision along with their practice compliance with BACP guidelines.

Lastly, the Senior School Counsellor facilitates monthly peer group supervision for the School Counsellor and Associate Counsellor and themselves attend termly line management supervision from the Assistant Head Pastoral.

### Safeguarding

It is important that students understand the meaning of confidentiality and that whatever has been discussed with the counsellor will be kept confidential except in very specific circumstances. These circumstances are explained to students in the Counselling Contract - see Appendix 3, and reiterated during the first session to check understanding. Students

should therefore be made aware that a disclosure of abuse or ‘at risk’ concerns will be shared with the safeguarding team, parents/guardians and potentially local authorities.

Posters depicting images of the safeguarding team are in all of the counselling rooms and the members of staff that make up the team are spoken about when discussing the process of disclosure.

MTBS	MTGS	Stanfield
Designated Safeguarding Lead: Deiniol Williams	Designated Safeguarding Lead: Jo Mayne	Designated Safeguarding Lead: Nick Benbow
Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead: Jonathon Green	Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead: Bridget Ward	Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead: Elaine Williams
	Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead: Jen Angwin	

The Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSL & DDSL) are the counsellor’s main point of contact within the school for Child Protection via CPOMS.

The Associate counsellor, in the first instance will communicate safeguarding concerns to the Senior School Counsellor, who will then escalate the matter with the safeguarding team.

Additionally, both the School Counsellor and Associate Counsellor may seek specialist advice and guidance on safeguarding/child protection issues from their counselling supervisor.

Once a safeguarding matter has been reported, the DSL or a DDSL are to report back to the relevant counsellor with an update regards the outcome of the disclosure prior to their next session with the student.

### Assessment and Evaluation

Students, alongside the counsellor, will complete an initial assessment so as to identify areas for work, risk and to serve as a base level of engagement. The same assessment will then be used in week 4 so as to measure if change has occurred and identify aims for further work. This process of assessment will take place every 4 - 6 weeks, if necessary, until the end of provision, whereupon an evaluation will be sought to identify areas of service delivery that were helpful, unhelpful or could be improved.

### Endings

All students have the right to withdraw from counselling at any time and it is the responsibility of all involved adults to make this explicit to them. However, if a student has not attended 3 consecutive counselling sessions the counsellor will contact them to gain their wishes and feelings about continued participation.

Furthermore, if a student fails to respond to 2 attempts of contact regards not having attended a session, the counsellor will approach the student and/or parent, if consent has been given regards attending counselling.

## Record keeping

The Counsellor will keep up to date records for referred pupils with referral forms and assessments being kept in email folders and session notes kept confidentially on 3sys. Only the school counsellor is able to access the records, which will contain minimal detail of content.

Student notes will be kept for 25 years from date of birth. In all cases subject to safeguarding considerations. Any information which may be relevant to potential claims should be retained for the lifetime of the pupil.

## Access to records

If a student wishes to see counselling notes, they should ask the counsellor in session or in writing and the counsellor should be present to go through them with the student.

In the event of any court case involving a student, the Judge has power to subpoena counselling notes, or request that a counselling report is provided as evidence for the case.

## Appendix 1

The following guidance is based on the Fraser Guidelines and adapted for application to counselling.

Factors to consider	Checklist for questions
<p><b><u>Immediate issues</u></b></p> <p>Child's age:</p> <p>Gillick test:</p>	<p>How old is the child or young person?</p> <p>Does the child or young person understand the mode of counselling?</p> <p>Are they refusing to allow their parents to be involved?</p> <p>Do their best interests require that the counselling be given without parental consent?</p>
<p><b><u>Short-term issues</u></b></p> <p>Nature of contact:</p> <p>Support systems:</p> <p>Nature of immediate issue or problem:</p> <p>Child protection responsibilities:</p>	<p>Is the contact with the counsellor controlled entirely by the child or young person?</p> <p>What support does the child or young person have access to alongside or in the place of counselling or therapy, should contact be broken or withdrawn?</p> <p>What is the degree of risk, if any, posed by the child to him or herself or to others (e.g. drugs, abuse, suicide, arson?) Is the risk significant, immediate or longer term?</p> <p>Is the counsellor required by their conditions of employment, or agency policy, to report all suspected child abuse to social services?</p>
<p><b><u>Longer-term issues</u></b></p> <p>Stage of cognitive and emotional development:</p>	<p>Does the child or young person understand the nature of the issue or problem?</p> <p>Their own needs and the needs of others?</p> <p>The risks and benefits of counselling or therapy?</p> <p>Does the child or young person have a sense of their own identity?</p>

	A sense of time, past, present and future? <i>Source: Jenkins, 1997: 216-7 (abbreviated version)</i>
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“Gillick competent” summarised:

- the maturity of the child/young person
- whether he/she demonstrates sufficient intelligence and understanding to enable him/her to understand what is being proposed, i.e. counselling
- whether he/she demonstrates sufficient intelligence and understanding of the consequences of his/her actions
- whether the child/young person understands that unless he/she receives counselling his/her well-being is likely to suffer. If the child/young person is Gillick competent, then they can access counselling without their parent’s/carer’s knowledge or consent, and even against their parents’/carers’ wishes.



## Appendix 2

The BACP definition is:

“Counselling takes place when a counsellor sees a client in a private and confidential setting to explore a difficulty the client is having, distress they may have experienced or perhaps their dissatisfaction with life, or loss of a sense of direction and purpose. It is always at the request of the client, as no one can properly be ‘sent’ for counselling. By listening attentively and patiently, the counsellor can begin to perceive the difficulties from the client’s point of view and can help them to see things more clearly, possibly from a different perspective. Counselling is a way of enabling choice or change or of reducing confusion. It does not involve giving advice or directing a client to take a particular course of action. Counsellors do not judge or exploit their clients in any way”. For a full definition see BACP – <https://www.bacp.co.uk/media/2637/bacp-what-is-counsellingpsychotherapy-c2.pdf>

## Appendix 3



### Merchant Taylors' School

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#### Counselling agreement

A counselling relationship is a unique connection that relies solely on acceptance, honesty and trust. Unlike other roles within the school, a counsellor is employed specifically to give a confidential service, which means that whatever you tell the counsellor is not shared with anyone else – remaining strictly confidential. Having said that, counsellors have a shared responsibility in keeping you safe, so there are some instances where confidentiality cannot be kept - see safeguarding.

As part of you accessing counselling at Merchant Taylors' we wish to make you aware of some of the responsibilities that we both hold in relation to us successfully working together.

#### Who needs to know

- You do not need to seek permission from your parent/guardian to access counselling at school.
- For attendance purposes, your counsellor will notify your subject teacher that you are leaving class to attend a session, but will not disclose the circumstances surrounding your reason for counselling or any of the content.
- Counsellors have external clinical supervision and discuss aspects of their work, which supports their best practice and aspects of your process might be discussed confidentiality during supervision.

#### What to expect from Counselling:

- Counsellors will help you to find your own ways of coming to terms with your situation or identify any difficulties that you are experiencing, at a pace that suits you.
- Sessions will run once weekly for 50 minutes, and will alternate throughout the day/week, so that you are not missing the same lesson routinely.
- Counsellors will review how the sessions are going in session 4, 8 and 12, with a maximum number of sessions offered being 15. If further work is required; if able, another counsellor will start with you or you may be put on a waiting list.

#### Where are the notes kept?

- A record of our sessions will be kept securely on a password protected database, which can only be access by your counsellor.

## Safeguarding

If you tell a counsellor that you, or someone else, is at risk of harm, confidentiality would have to be broken and what has been said shared with the relevant safeguarding team. At this stage the counsellor would keep you informed of the necessary steps thereafter, which may include the involvement of agencies such as children's services, CAMHS, the school nurse, the Police and your parent/carer.

### If you have to cancel?

- If you wish to cancel an appointment, please give at least 24 hours' notice by emailing your counsellor.
- If you miss 3 sessions, unless due to mitigating circumstances, we will be unable to continue supporting you.

### Complaints and compliments

- If you wish to make a complaint and you don't feel that you can discuss it with your counsellor. Please follow the steps of the Complaints Policy, which can be found on the school website, under Policies.

If you would like to give positive feedback about your experience, in addition to the evaluation paperwork, you can document your experience via email to [L.Ashley@merchanttaylors.com](mailto:L.Ashley@merchanttaylors.com)

## Equality and Diversity

The School is committed to work to eradicate discrimination and prejudice of all kinds to create equality of opportunity, not only fulfilling its legal position in relation to current and future equality legislation but going beyond compliance in providing and promoting opportunity for all students to succeed, free from any aspect of discrimination.

### Working hours of the team

Adrian - Associate Counsellor	Tues 8:30 – 4:30pm
Krystal – School Counsellor	Mon and Wed 8:15 – 4:15pm
Lyndsey – Senior School Counsellor	Mon – Thurs 8:15 – 4:15 Fri 8 – 4pm

Please print and sign your name below to confirm that you have understood the agreement and that you give consent for our work to start.

Client name (please print).....

Client signature..... Date.....