



مدرسة ديرة الدولية  
DEIRA INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL  
FESTIVAL CITY

 Al-Futtaim Education Foundation

# Whole School Counselling Policy

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## Purpose of the policy

This policy sets the framework, principles and procedures for the success of the School Counselling Service at Deira International School.

## What is Counselling?

*“Counselling is a talking therapy that involves a trained therapist listening to you and helping you find ways to deal with emotional issues”*

## Counselling Service

- At Deira International School is independent, confidential, holistic and person-centred approached. These four elements are an important aspect of this service, particularly when dealing with those students who may feel disconnected from the school and its community.
- Students who require counselling support stipulate that the prerequisite to access counselling support is to have parental/guardian (visa sponsor) **consent**, even though content of counselling is subjective to confidentiality.
- Successful counselling is based on trust, and building a strong relationship between counsellor and student, self-motivation, consistency and commitment. It must be a voluntary activity and is therefore **not** part of the disciplinary procedures of the school.
- While the counsellor is accountable to the young person, the nature of their work means that the counsellor will be ultimately accountable to the school system.

## Why do we need a School Counsellor?

- Counselling is a way of supporting our students, teachers and parents through a process of talking, listening and self-development in an ever-changing world. Students are provided with a safe place to express their feelings and thoughts about what they perceive to be an issue in their life. Counselling can help students to understand themselves and their situation better. It can give them new ways of coping with issues that cause them worry or upset, and for our students this will result in increased capacity for learning.
- When students are experiencing difficulties at home or in school their concentration and the way they behave can be adversely affected.
- A school-based service brings counselling to students in a place that is familiar, safe and secure. By providing emotional support and enabling students to 'off load' feelings and anxieties, counselling can help students to concentrate more in class, feel better about themselves, build positive peer relationships and build their self-confidence.

## What is counselling and how may it help?

- Counselling is a process which offers support and guidance when things feel particularly difficult. Students face many challenges whilst growing up and may find at times that they need someone external to talk to and reflect on aspects of their lives. School counselling for students may be about developmental issues, anxiety, anger, resolving problems, improving relationships, building friendships, making choices, coping with changes, gaining insight and understanding, building up self-esteem and self-confidence.

We cannot counsel students/young people the same way we counsel adults. If we are able to engage students so that they can talk freely about their issues, then we need to use talking therapy alongside other strategies.

Counselling can:

- Give them a safe space to explore their thoughts and feelings while reflecting on past situations and struggles.
- Support students to understand their relationships better, at home and at school, and improve them.
- Support students to increase their level of self-awareness and self-confidence.
- Support students to explore their feelings to understand and manage them better.

- Support students recognize unhelpful thought patterns and adopt new ones.
- Support students in adaptation of new environments and social groups.
- Support students improve their communication skills.
- Offer a place to talk openly and confidentially without being judged.
- Create a conducive environment to explore and express their emotions freely.

Issues students and young people may be struggling with include, but are not limited to:

- Bullying
- Academic pressure
- Difficulty concentrating
- Transition and change
- Anger
- Peer pressure
- Family relationships
- Friendship difficulties
- Anxiety and depression
- Loss and grief
- Confusion
- Low self esteem

It is equally important to remember that, as adults, we sometimes need support at difficult times in our lives. There are challenges directly associated with living in a transient place like Dubai, away from family and friends. The counselling service can also provide parents with support and in more serious cases, make recommendations for external agencies to support the family.

#### **Referrals:**

Staff or parents may consider making a referral for some of the following reasons:

- Becoming very subdued or over excited; has marked mood swings or is exhibiting behaviour that is 'out of character'.
- Refusing to go.
- Victim or perpetrator of bullying.
- Having difficulties due to a family breakdown or parents separating.
- Having peer group difficulties/relationships.
- Finding it hard to cope following the death of a family member/close friend.
- Experiencing low self-esteem.
- Finding it hard to concentrate in school and the standard of their work has dropped dramatically.
- Having difficulty regulating their emotions.

This list is not exclusive, and the counsellor will be able to offer advice about the suitability of all referrals.

Students in Secondary can self-refer for support

#### **Referral process:**

- Parents can refer their child to seek counselling by emailing the child's teacher or counsellor directly. Please refer to the Well-being section of the school website for contact details of the primary or secondary counsellor.
- Referrals may be made by staff using the Referral Form on the staff portal. Where appropriate, the student must be made aware that a referral is in process and voluntarily agrees to it
- Teachers wishing to refer a student should in the first instance should discuss the case with YLC/SLT. Urgent cases may be referred directly to the counsellor through the Safeguarding and Community Portal which is found on the Staff Homepage.
- The referral must include a detailed account of the concerns and the actions taken before making the referral.

- Once the referral has been received, an initial meeting and assessment will be booked with the student (not during core subjects) within one week of referral or sooner depending on the severity of the concern.
- Primary School student referrals will involve a discussion with parents regarding the concern.
- Subjective to assessment, the next step of action will be discussed with YLC/SLT, teacher and/or parents where applicable, and in line with confidentiality.

## **Confidentiality:**

### **Why is confidentiality important?**

Confidentiality is essential to the formal counselling process:

To enable the young person to develop a trusting relationship with the counsellor.

To allow the young person to open up and share feelings without fear of blame or reprisal.

To allow the young person to speak freely about issues concerning them.

To encourage others to come forward for counselling.

Problems in maintaining confidentiality are unlikely to occur if there is mutual trust, goodwill and respect between counsellor, school, staff and parents.

### **How does confidentiality work?**

- The young person is free to talk to anyone about their counselling sessions if they wish but should not be directly questioned by school staff.
- The counsellor will not pass on any detailed accounts of sessions but may communicate periodically with school staff about general progress, with the student's permission.
- It would be reasonable to expect the school counsellor to record issues raised by students in general, in order to inform school development and policy.
- For the students to feel supported between counselling sessions, they may wish a trusted member of staff to know they are receiving counselling. Where this is applicable, the trusted member of staff will be informed and given the option to support the student.

Good practice involves working in partnership with parents. In most cases, students are willing to agree for a parent/s (only one signature is required) to be asked for written consent for them to receive counselling that will take place in school time.

### **What limitations are there to confidentiality?**

Counsellors have the right to make decisions about sharing information and confidentiality. This will be done in a reasonable way and in the best interest of the student.

### **Breaching confidentiality**

- At the outset, the counsellor will make it clear to the student that they may need to breach confidentiality (i.e., tell someone and seek help). This may happen when the student or any other person (adult or child) is at risk of significant harm.
- The counsellor will discuss this with the student to gain their consent to disclosing their concerns. Where possible, the counsellor will keep them informed and involve them in this process.
- Even without the students' consent, it may be necessary to disclose information they have revealed.
- The counsellor is not required to pass on information about a student breaking a school rule or committing an offence, unless it could be deemed that by withholding information the counsellor was aiding and abetting a crime (e.g. a student stealing in school).

### **When is parental consent needed?**

- It is generally understood that children of Primary School age will need consent from their parent/carer to access the Counselling Service (See Appendix 1).
- For parents of children (in most cases this will be Year 7 and upwards), parental permission to seek counselling will not be required but would be preferred. Students will be offered one or two initial

exploratory sessions with the counsellor to outline what is involved, to allow the counsellor and the school to assess their needs before they commit themselves and to encourage the young person to agree to have their parents approached to continue ongoing counselling.

- Where parents of children in Year 7 and above withhold consent or the young person may be distressed and unwilling for the school to approach the parents, counselling can go ahead if the counsellor's assessment of the young person is deemed suitable:

How does the counsellor assess?

The counsellor will consider the following:

- The young person has sufficient understanding to enable them to accept what is being proposed and consequences of his or her actions, i.e. counselling
- The maturity of the young person
- The nature of their problem
- Developmental stage of the young person (physically, emotionally and intellectually)

### Child Protection

- The school has a child protection policy. The policy sets out the procedures to be used when there is a disclosure about child abuse concerns or an allegation against a member of staff. This policy also applies to the school counsellor in the event of a disclosure of abuse during a counselling session. The counsellor is required to follow the procedures as stated in the Protection Policy. The Counsellor will work closely with the Designated Senior Person in supporting the child/young person concerned.

### Monitoring and Evaluation of the Service

- Monitoring of the counselling service provision will take place on an ongoing basis to evaluate performance, identify areas of concern and inform service development.
- Data collected may include:
  - Numbers of young people attending.
  - Gender of young people attending.
  - Number of sessions per young person.
  - Numbers who did not keep counselling appointments.
  - Range of Issues arising e.g., family conflict, bullying, anger
  - Safeguarding issues/concerns e.g., Domestic violence, sexual, physical, emotional abuse, neglect.
  - Action resulting from safeguarding concerns.
  - Ethnicity of young people accessing counselling.
  - Disability, illness, special needs.
  - Immediate impact of counselling for the young person.
  - Evaluation will take place using a variety of methods including: feedback forms and peer evaluation.

### Timeline for Counselling Services

- Counselling sessions timeline is based on WAVE intervention level. In cases where a student requires individual/group sessions during class time, the YLC and class teacher will be informed. These sessions will be held during non-core subject times or a time that is deemed appropriate by YLC and SLT.
- **Wave 1:** Students with minimal support needs. In most cases the support can be provided by their form teacher or head of year. In some cases, the student prefers to keep this confidential and approach the counsellor.

Severity = Low  
Frequency = 1

- **Wave 2:** Students with low support needs but have regular contact with the counsellor. These students will be encouraged to seek support through their form teacher, head of year or drop-in sessions rather than arranged weekly appointments with the counsellor.

Severity = Low  
Frequency = 1+

- **Wave 3:** These are students that will have intensive support and will be seen weekly or in some cases they will be seen multiple times a week. These are students that needed one to one support to deal with complex personal and emotional concerns that would impact on the ability to engage within a social and learning environment.

Severity = High  
Frequency = Weekly or more

### **What can parents expect if their child is accessing the counselling service?**

- An initial conversation with the School Counsellor (by phone, virtual meeting, or a face-to-face meeting) to discuss the following:
- Areas which the student will need support with from the School Counsellor (the class teacher may be present for this, if applicable)
- Seeking of parental consent for the child to receive counselling sessions (See Appendix 1)
- Explanation of the Counselling process for students
- Feedback from the school counsellor following specific sessions which may require parental support at home through use of resources or techniques. This will be a general overview and will not entail specific details of the sessions which would breach confidentiality.
- Counselling sessions to be timetabled for different non-core subjects to ensure progress in a particular subject is not impacted.
- Communication between the School Counsellor and parents/carers to identify ways for parents to support their child at home.
- Communication between the school counsellor and the student's class teacher to discuss ways in which the student can be supported in class.

### **Whole School Approach to Wellbeing**

At Deira International School, the safety and wellbeing of all students is at the forefront of all decisions that are made. Studies indicate that a child's emotional wellbeing is the strongest predictor of adult happiness and success. We acknowledge that whole-school approaches to wellbeing and student's social and emotional skills can lead to improvements in:

- Academic success
- Mental health
- Motivation
- Behaviour
- Self-esteem
- Attendance
- The nature and quality of relationships formed

The wellbeing of students at Deira International School is fostered through lessons, interactions with their subject teachers/form tutors/class teachers, celebration assemblies, and awareness days. Student wellbeing is closely monitored via individual wellbeing surveys. This allows staff to take a proactive approach to ensuring that appropriate support is put in place for all students.