

COUNSELLING SERVICES POLICY

This Policy is designed to ensure Emmanuel College complies with the 7 minimum Child Safe Standards in line with Ministerial Order No 870. As educators, we have a mandatory obligation to create a culture which prioritises a safe, nurturing community for every child. The Standards provide a framework for routinely reviewing and strengthening child safety strategies, policies and practices.

Purpose

The Emmanuel College Counselling Team provides high quality, short-term, evidence-based counselling services to support the mental health of our students. Given that over half of all adult mental health conditions emerge by age 14, secondary school is a crucial time to identify and support vulnerable students. The College Counselling Team focuses on providing early intervention services that are client centered and tailored to the challenges experienced by young people. The College Counselling Team is made up of mental health professionals with a range of skills. Our team consists of fully qualified psychologists, provisional psychologists (psychology students in their final year of study) and youth workers.

Service Provision

The primary focus of school counselling is to provide professional one-on-one, short-term support to students who are experiencing distress. Support is aimed at empowering students, and their support networks, by providing evidence-based strategies and intervention. In addition to individual counselling, the school counsellors also offer small group programs to target common needs (such as social skills groups), provide parent and teacher consultation, and response to critical incidents.

Informed Consent

At the beginning of each session, all students will receive information about the voluntary nature of school counselling, the risks and benefits of engaging in this service, and the limits of confidentiality. The process of gaining signed informed consent depends on the age of the student;

- For students aged 14 and under, written parental consent will be sought from both parents/guardians. In a limited set of circumstances, parental consent from one parent will be suffice.
- Students aged 15 and over who demonstrate an ability to understand the risks and benefits of counselling are considered mature minors. These students may sign their own consent forms.

All students at Emmanuel College have access to two sessions with a school counsellor without parental contact, to allow for timely responses to immediate safety concerns. The College Counselling Team are aware of the vital role that parents and guardians play in supporting their children, and wherever possible, aims to collaborate with parents and families to promote the mental health of the student.

Confidentiality

All counselling sessions are confidential, with the only exceptions being if there is a risk of harm to the student or another person, or if a subpoena is served, or if disclosures are required under the school's Child Safe Policy. Detailed information about confidentiality and privacy will be communicated with parents or the young person in writing during, or prior to, their first session.

When necessary and appropriate, the school counsellor may discuss the student's circumstances with the student's teachers, having sought permission from the student and/or parent. School counsellors will report to House Leaders, Pastoral Co-ordinators and Campus Leaders as needed.

Referral Process

Students are typically referred to the College Counselling Team by the pastoral staff (their House Leader or Pastoral Co-ordinator). Students also can self-refer to counselling. If a parent would like their son/daughter to access the school counselling services, it is recommended that they contact the student's House Leader in the first instance. There is no need to obtain a mental health care plan or referral from your doctor. The House Leaders can then provide detailed information about the referral to the College Counselling Team.

Depending on the number of referrals, counsellors may have to prioritise students at risk and/or refer to other services. Where a counsellor assesses that the presenting issues are systemic, the family should be encouraged to seek support, family therapy, or counselling from outside agencies. The Counselling Team will provide the parent/guardian or student with an approximate waiting period at the time of referral.

What Happens in Counselling

The counsellor introduces themselves to the student either during Homeroom or via email, depending on the student's preference. The school counsellor allocates a 40-minute appointment time to the student, during the course of the school day. Students are expected to go to their class, listen to teacher instructions, and then present the teacher with their counselling appointment slip to excuse them from 40 minutes of the class. Sometimes, students indicate a preference to be emailed about their appointments, or to be collected from class by a school counsellor; these preferences are discussed in the first counselling session with the student. A limited number of counselling sessions are available during lunchtime and after school. Senior students undertaking VCE studies are given priority access to these sessions.

Students are generally seen for approximately six weekly or fortnightly sessions of counselling; if they continue to need ongoing mental health support after this period, the counsellor may ~~will~~ arrange for an appropriate external referral.

Referrals to External Specialists

Occasionally, referrals will be made by the psychologist to external professionals, such as doctors, pediatricians, psychiatrists, psychologists, and social workers. This may be necessary depending on the nature of the presenting problem and the degree of intervention required. External referrals will be discussed with the student and their parent/guardian and the rationale for the referral will be explained. Psychologists will facilitate and collaborate this referral process with the consent of the parent/guardian.

Out of School Hours Support

The College Counselling Team, and the College Pastoral Team more broadly, does not have the resources or capacity to provide out of hours crisis support to students. Emails or voicemails received outside of school hours, including on weekends and school holidays, are unlikely to be seen until the next school day. In the event of a mental health emergency, it is recommended that you call the emergency services on 000 or present to a hospital emergency department. If you need to speak with a professional urgently outside of school hours, the College encourages students or family members to contact one of the following organisations to seek support and guidance.

- Parentline (open until midnight) 13 22 89
- KidsHelpline (for ages 5-25) 1800 55 1800 <https://kidshelpline.com.au/get-help/webchat-counselling/>
- Child Protection after hours 13 12 78
- Lifeline 13 11 14

A list of Services for Young People is available on page 2 of the Student Handbook for easy access.

Communication of Policy and Where to Direct Questions

This College Counselling Service Policy is available on the College website. Parents are provided a copy of the policy as part of the enrolment process. Information from the Counselling Team is published in our newsletters. Students are notified of counselling service via Student Notices and the Student Handbook. Any questions regarding the provision of counselling services should be directed to the student's House Leader in the first instance.

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