

APPENDIX

THE ROLE OF COUNSELLING IN THE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE PROCESS

College Procedure

Tutors have a statutory duty to report disclosed abuse to the designated member of staff (DMS) in college and to complete paperwork to make this report. Clear guidelines are given to tutors concerning this procedure.

At what point, and how, should tutors refer to counselling?

The counselling service believes it is best practice for tutors to offer emotional support at the *first available opportunity* and *in parallel* with the legal process.

The Designated Member of Staff should establish whether the tutor has felt unable, for whatever reason, to discuss counselling at the time of disclosure. In this case, the Designated Member of Staff could meet with the student to ensure that he/she offers it in a pro-active way. (i.e. that they agree with the student that they may give us a contact number for the student and we give them a call, or they offer to help the student make an appointment). Students are, of course, under no obligation whatsoever to take up the offer.

Tutors who have a concern about a student, *before* any disclosure is made, can refer them to counselling at any time.

If tutors have a concern about a student, the counselling team can enter into a general discussion to try to clarify the situation and explore the issues, without identifying any students.

What is the difference, for the learner, between talking to a tutor and talking to a counsellor?

Students in college need to be aware of the different ways in which they can share information, and the implications of any route they choose. Besides being aware of the procedure if they talk to a tutor, they need to know:

Clients can talk about anything in counselling, even if it is outside the college rules or the law. For example, talking about drugs is not illegal, taking or dealing them in a classroom is, may be harmful to others, and tutors would have to act accordingly.

Counsellors do not have a direct responsibility for discipline, achievement or affect on other learners in the same way that a tutor does. However, under the BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy) code of practice, a counsellor needs to take into account circumstances in which harm may occur to the client or others, e.g. siblings or peers.

Thus, there may be very exceptional circumstances when the counsellor might feel it necessary to discuss with the client whether the boundary of confidentiality should be re-considered. For example, a counsellor may say to the client that they are so concerned for their welfare that it would be irresponsible to do nothing, and in order to keep them safe, they need to involve some additional support/ outside agencies. They would then discuss options with the client.

Such circumstances may arise where there is, or could be, a serious emotional, mental or physical risk to the client. This risk is on a continuum and will involve the subjective but professional opinion of the counsellor, who will also take into account the ability of the young person to make their own informed decision as well as weighing a range of factors including moral, ethical, professional and legal obligations.

It is important for students to be aware that in the last six years, there have been no cases when a counsellor has felt it necessary to share information outside the counselling service without the knowledge and permission of the client. However, they have referred on at the request of or after discussion with the client.

Supervision, Debriefing and Reflective Practice

Counsellors are expected to discuss sensitive or complex cases, without identifying clients, with the Head of Service.

To ensure high standards, and to help and protect both the counsellor and client, all counsellors, however experienced, are required to meet regularly with a professional Supervisor who is not part of the college. The counsellor may discuss aspects of their work with the supervisor but the identity of the client is kept confidential.

How can counselling support tutors?

Counselling offers the opportunity for one-off de-briefing after a learner has disclosed anything sensitive or traumatic to a tutor.

Reflective Practice is also available and has a slightly wider purpose. It may be a single session or more regular. It is concerned with anything that is work related or affects work or working relationships, including those between staff and/or learners. We would ensure that the counsellor seeing a member of staff is not the same counsellor who sees the learner. (See our leaflet on Reflective Practice).

Staff Counselling is available off site, with independent counsellors, who are not directly employed by the college. Staff pay a reduced fee for this service, which is intended to help with *any* personal issues that may be affecting an individual.

We are happy to discuss options and make referrals to other support agencies if this is desired by staff. The Counselling staff will not recommend a specific agency/external counsellor.

The College procedure

How can counselling offer support for the welfare of students who may be “at risk”, and/or whose issues may or may not come under the auspices of legislation relating to safeguarding children and young people?

Counselling:

- Provides emotional support alongside the emergency action of, for example, ensuring a student is in a “place of safety”, or practical support such as finding accommodation or advocacy throughout a legal process
- Takes time to gather information about circumstances, symptoms and the risk continuum on which the client finds him/herself
- Places as first priority the wishes and best interest of the client but gives time to assess whether the student has the ability/ emotional or mental health necessary to self-determine, i.e. to think/make decisions/judgements/be autonomous
- Provides an opportunity for client to:
 - take time (as long as the student wants and needs) to emotionally process the impact of having disclosed or proposed disclosure
 - explore options for actions
 - choose actions
 - explore possible consequences
- Can facilitate disclosure at a time that feels right for the client. The knowledge that counselling is confidential (although still not absolute in certain circumstances) is crucial in enabling *some* clients to feel safe enough to disclose.
- Students need to be aware that apart from in very extreme circumstances, (as is explained to them) the session content is private and so is the fact that they are attending (or not) sessions. Therefore:
- May help to bring a client to a point when they feel ready to disclose something previously kept hidden. The client remains in control and is affirmed because of this. Also,
- Bears in mind that since abuse is about taking control away from an individual, dealing with the effects of abuse may constitute part of the work done with a client and it may not be the priority at the start of the counselling process.
- Takes into account that disclosure may, in some circumstances, at this moment/ temporarily or ongoing, put client at greater risk than non-disclosure
- Bears in mind that physical, mental or emotional abuse may be either a single incident or ongoing but either may have a long-term and far-reaching effect and the client may need a lot of time to come to terms with / heal in relation to what has happened