



East Ayrshire Council  
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir an Ear

# Secondary School Counselling Service

Good Practice Guide for Schools



Examples of Good  
practice in School  
Counselling Provision  
from Secondary  
schools across East  
Ayrshire

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# 1

## Purpose

School Counselling in East Ayrshire Secondary schools has been provided by Exchange Wellbeing since January 2021. As the service has developed, it has been crucial for school counselling leads to meet up with each other to discuss challenges they have faced and share solutions and good practice with each other. This document is intended to be used either by current school counselling leads to help them improve practice within their own schools, or as a reference guide for any new staff that take on the role.

The document provides some practical suggestions for counselling leads and guidance staff on how to effectively set up and support a counselling service within their establishment. All examples of good practice have come from Schools in East Ayrshire through discussions, observation and focus groups with School Counselling leads.

The guidance will provide:

- Practical suggestions for how to effectively support and develop School Counselling within your own establishment
- Examples of resources schools can use to support the implementation of School Counselling within your own establishment

This guidance should be used in conjunction with the [“East Ayrshire Counselling & Wellbeing Supports for Children and Young People – Guidelines to support Effective Implementation in Secondary Schools”](#) document, which can be found in the School Counselling Coordinators team or on the Glow tile.

# 2

## Ensuring Requests for Assistance (RFA's) are appropriate through the use of an effective triage system

The DHT and Pupil Support Staff team at Kilmarnock Academy were aware that although having a counselling service in school was hugely beneficial for pupils, if not managed properly could easily become overloaded. It was important to them to have a service that was accessible. In order for this to happen, RFA's to the service had to be appropriate. The DHT established an effective triage system which ensured RFA's were well thought out and that pupil support staff had the opportunity to discuss them with someone in school prior to contacting the Exchange.

### Example of Triage Process

1. Guidance Teacher should fully discuss counselling with the Young Person and ensure that the Young Person wants to attend and that counselling is the right support for them. At this point, you may wish to refer to the "East Ayrshire Wellbeing Supports for Children, Young People and Families" document to explore some of the other interventions that may be more suitable including self-help resources. The Exchange Counselling leaflet can also be used to give Young People a better understanding of what counselling involves.
2. Guidance teacher should then discuss the request with the School Counselling Coordinator before submitting the request. This discussion should help to determine whether counselling is, the right support for the young person or if there are other, universal supports that could be put in place first. Again, please use the "East Ayrshire Wellbeing Supports for Children, Young People and Families" and the Secondary School Counselling Guidance Document to support the discussion.
3. If the Young Person, Guidance teacher, School Counselling Coordinator and anyone else appropriate from the Team Around the Child, are all in agreement that counselling is the right support for them, the online form can be submitted to the Exchange.

The DHT and PT of Pupil Support also regularly monitor RFA's and take appropriate action to manage these at "peak times" such as exams or ahead of a school holiday. When there is a waiting list, Pupil support staff may be asked only to submit "high needs" RFA's for a short term period until the waiting list is more manageable.

# 3

## The Whole School Approach

Pupil Support Staff at Stewarton Academy recognise the value of ensuring that counsellors are fully integrated into the life of the school. Wherever possible, the counsellors are included in whole school events to support a preventative approach towards Mental Health. In recent months, Stewarton Academy have held Wellbeing workshops and roadshows and have worked with the counsellors to ensure they were fully involved.

In February 2022, they delivered mental wellbeing workshops to the whole of S1 and the exchange counsellors shared information about the service with 165 pupils.

In May 2022, Stewarton held a mental wellbeing roadshow for all S2 pupils who had workshops on Respect, Community and Loneliness as well as an anti-bullying video by S2 and S5 pupils! Exchange counsellors Helen and Linda delivered workshops on loneliness.

More recently, the school counsellors Helen and Linda attended parents evenings. Both counsellors were delighted to be part of this and had lots of meaningful conversations with parents.

Counsellors are very visible throughout the school and this is something that is having a very positive impact on reducing the stigma of counselling.

Around 20 members of staff attended including guidance, several from the English department and classroom assistants. The PowerPoint will be shared with more members of staff following the training. The training highlighted the issue of "performance anxiety" to staff and the trainer Amy discussed ways to support with this, As a result, the Exchange will be supporting groups around this theme. The training also highlighted the issue of anxiety in high performing girls. Staff considered how to reframe the language they use to ensure they are supporting the girls with this – this has been taken back to the wellbeing COP for further discussion. Stewarton will receive some follow up training from the Exchange to ensure that staff can confidently embed some of the learning into every day practice.

At Doon Academy, staff liaise well with the school counsellor to ensure flexibility is built into his timetable and utilise this to meet specific needs within the school. Staff have identified that there is still a stigma around counselling for some Young People so have worked closely with their counsellor to ensure he is visible around the school. The Counsellor regularly attends PSE classes, assemblies etc to talk about a number of issues related to mental health and wellbeing and also to share information about the service. The school also recognised that there was a specific need around exam stress so worked with the counsellor to set up "Exam Stress Support Groups." This also encouraged Young People who didn't want to attend 1-1 sessions to engage and get to know the counsellor better. This had a positive impact on the number of Young People choosing to access the service on a 1-1 basis.

# 4

## The Counselling Environment

The Pupil Support team at St Joseph's Academy had reflected on the importance of having a safe, welcoming and confidential space for pupils to access counselling. They wanted to make it a welcoming and calm space for their young people and ensure it had helpful information for them to access in it.

Currently the room has the following items:

- Couch
- Lava lamp
- Lamp for mood lighting
- Phone (can make external calls or internal)
- List of Internal phone numbers for all staff
- Tissues
- Fidget toys / stress balls
- Small table
- Posters with numbers for Samaritans, Breathing Space & Childline
- Pillows
- Throw
- Bean bags
- Colouring books
- Coloured pencils

They have put a display outside the room with photos of the counsellors, names and days/times in school. The room is situated in a quiet part of the school, next to the pupil support staff base.

Staff, Young People and Counsellors at Grange Academy have also commented positively on their counselling room. The room is bright and welcoming, with appropriate posters and signposting resources displayed. It is right next to the Guidance staff office, which means positive relationships and communication were formed very quickly at Grange Academy. It is also discreet and confidential and is in a quiet space in the school so that sessions are not interrupted.

# 5

## Effective Systems & Procedures to support confidentiality

Children and Young People (over the age of 12 who have capacity to consent) have the right to access the school counselling service confidentially. This means they may come to their Guidance teacher for a referral but not want any other staff in the school to know they are attending counselling sessions. Or they may not want ANYONE else to know they are accessing counselling and submit a self-referral.

This can be challenging for schools to manage but there are measures that can be taken to ensure that the Young Person's confidentiality is respected.

Stewarton Academy have come up with the following system to ensure Young People who have a counselling appointment are able to get out of class without having to disclose where they are going:

- Noticeboard in guidance staff area where staff simply put on initials of YP who has an appointment (could be counselling or something else) then the CT can be notified they will be out of class.
- The CT is not told the reason for this and guidance staff don't necessarily have to be notified either by office (self referrals)
- Effective communication between counsellors and office staff allow this system to be very successful.
- Office staff are very good at finding pupils to get them out of class where needed.

Young People who have made a self referral also have the option of just showing their text message from the Exchange to their Class Teacher to be let out of class. However, this relies on the Young Person feeling comfortable enough to do this with the Class Teacher and other systems should be in place to ensure confidentiality is respected.

All Staff in Schools should be familiar with the School Counselling Service and have an understanding of the Young Person's right to access this confidentially.



# 6

## Promotion of Service including Self Referrals

The PT of Pupil Support at Robert Burns Academy has developed a "[Promoting Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing](#)" website, which pupil's staff and parents can all access.

The website, firstly gives young people and parents information about mental health and wellbeing and signposts them to online information and videos they can use. They are then given information about various universal approaches within the school such as wellbeing champions, mindfulness groups and PSE Programmes.

For Young People who need more targeted support, there is clear information about the Exchange counselling service for parents and pupils. Pupils are given the option to self-refer on the website and can do this online easily. Leaflets with QR codes for self-referral are also displayed clearly on the website and there are posters displayed around the school. The posters are displayed in places such as study hubs where pupils are most likely to see them. As part of the whole school approach on MHWB, class teachers at RBA are also confident at signposting Young People to the Exchange and other services as well as self-help and universal supports.

Pupil support have worked closely with the counsellors to bring them into PSE classes to help increase visibility amongst pupils. In the PSE sessions, pupils have been given some universal support on how to look after their wellbeing and have also been given more detailed information about the exchange including how to self-refer.

The promotion of the Exchange counselling service in Robert Burns Academy amongst pupils, parents and staff is helping ensure that Young People get the right support for their wellbeing at the right time. As a result, RFA's to the Exchange have been more appropriate and waiting lists are more manageable. Parents, pupils and staff have access to mental wellbeing support at all levels and are well informed about how they can access this. The counsellors are embedded into the school community and as a result, the stigma of seeking support for mental health is reducing.

Pupil Support Staff at RBA encourage pupils to provide feedback on the Exchange at PLP and PSE sessions and signpost them to the "Promoting Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing" website/blog to do this.



# 7

## Communication with Counsellors

The Pupil Support Team at Grange Academy appreciate the value in forming and maintaining positive relationships with young people, colleagues, parents and partners. From very early on, prior to the Counselling Service being established, there were strong links between the DHT of pupil support at Grange Academy and the School Counselling Service Co-ordinator. Grange Academy were keen to ensure the counselling service would meet the needs of their school community and young people. When the counselling service was set up, from Day 1, the staff at Grange Academy made sure they put the fundamentals in place to ensure the service was as successful as possible in their school. The key fundamentals, which have ensured the service has been a success at Grange Academy, are:

- The school counsellors were given a space close to the Guidance team within the school
- The Counsellors were allocated a nice sunny, spacious room with access to a phone. They worked with the counsellors to make this room as welcoming and therapeutic as possible. The room includes relevant posters and signposting information and includes comfortable seating for the Young people.
- Welcoming the school counsellors as part of the guidance team for lunch/coffee breaks etc.
- Daily communication between Guidance staff and counsellors (following confidentiality guidelines)
- Inviting the Exchange to deliver a 1-hour introduction session to the resilience based framework. This will ensure all staff at Grange Academy are able to support a YP with their wellbeing and signpost them to further support where necessary.

At Loudoun Academy, all guidance staff are free 1st period to focus solely on Pupil Support issues. Staff utilise this time, when needed, to catch up with the School Counsellors. Counsellors share updates about the service, Guidance staff share important school updates and counsellors are able to answer any questions they may have, discuss issues with any YP that has arisen since last sessions etc. (If YP has given consent to discuss with guidance teacher)

# 8

## Pupil Voice and Co-production of Service

The Pupil Support Team at Grange Academy have been really keen to ensure that pupils feedback and views on the counselling service are listened to both at local authority and establishment level. To ensure pupils are truly empowered, they sought the views of pupils on how they would prefer to give feedback on the counselling service. One pupil who has attended counselling is really keen to ensure that pupils have the opportunity to discuss their experiences as well as just feeding back through a survey or form. She has volunteered to facilitate a pupil group which focuses on providing ideas, opinions and feedback on the counselling service. She will be supported by a guidance teacher to set this up and formulate discussions points etc if required, but she will run the groups without an adult present. The pupils felt this was important for confidentiality and to ensure feedback is honest and will have an impact.

The feedback will be entirely anonymous and will be used by the school and the local authority to influence change/improvements. The local authority counselling coordinator will also link in this group nearer the end to focus on how they can have more voice and ownership of the service.

Sessions have not yet started but we will share the progress of these once they are up and running.

Stewarton Academy have a very active group of wellbeing champions. The School counselling coordinator met with this group to gather their views and opinions on the counselling service and mental wellbeing supports in general. As a result of the meeting, the wellbeing champions have agreed to play a more active role in promoting the counselling service in PSE classes. They recognise that there is still a bit of a stigma around accessing the counselling service so have agreed to help produce an animation to share with their peers which will help to answer some common questions around counselling and hopefully bust some myths!

# 9 Relational Practice and Supporting Staff Wellbeing

The Guidance Teacher at Park Secondary School was very clear from the beginning of establishing a relationship with the Exchange that the approach taken by both counsellors and school staff would often have to be slightly different from other schools. Due to a range of additional support needs, the young People at Park school require a much more relational approach to accessing school counselling than may be required in mainstream schools.

The Guidance teacher is very keen for counsellors to understand the Young person's background before beginning the intervention. This helps to ensure the success of the intervention. In order for this to happen, the Guidance teacher completes much more detailed referrals than some of the other schools. With the Young Person's consent, often a member of school staff will accompany the Young Person to their appointment as having a familiar adult present initially can help them engage better.

There is a bench situated near the guidance staff base where Young People can also sit after a counselling session if they need time to regulate or support afterwards.

Small group sessions are also used more often in Park school as young People often feel more comfortable attending sessions with their peers.

## **Reflective Practice**

Park school have set up their own system of "reflective practice" for all staff within their school. Staff meet on a regular basis in trios. The purpose of the sessions are to give staff a "safe space" to discuss anything related to their work. This could be workload, young people they are supporting, wellbeing concerns etc.

Staff at Park school have reported feeling more valued since the trios were established and have all commented on improvements in morale and wellbeing.

# 10

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