

# Counselling Policy



OUR LADY OF MERCY COLLEGE PARRAMATTA

## Policy Objectives

- To provide professional counselling services as part of its Pastoral Care Program to assist students and their families manage issues that may hinder their wellbeing and learning.
- To provide a safe environment and assist students develop appropriate skills and attitudes to resolve problems in academic, psychological, emotional and social contexts.

## Policy Statement

Within a College environment students may experience a wide range of behavioural, emotional, social and psychological issues that, if left untreated, may jeopardise their wellbeing and learning. Examples include mental health concerns, friendship difficulties, family breakdowns, relationship issues, eating disorders, grief and loss, bullying, traumatic events, alcohol and substance abuse, self-esteem and identity difficulties.

It is our policy that:

- Professional counselling services are made available to all students at no additional charge;
- The College's counselling services be highly visible to students and the general College community; and
- The College's counselling services are easy to access.

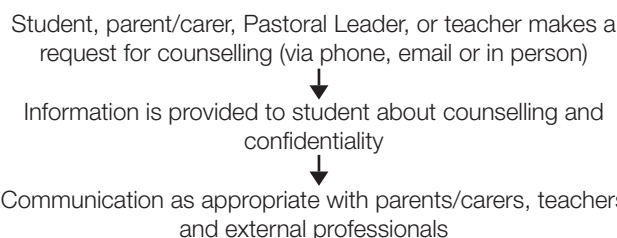
The availability of the College's counselling services are highly visible to students and to the wider College community. Initiatives to ensure the visibility of the College's counselling services include:

- Informing all staff as to the nature and availability of the services;
- Physical positioning of counselling services in the Student Centre;
- Providing contact details for counselling services on the College's public website;
- Providing contact details for counselling services on the College's student portal;
- Providing details of counselling services in the College staff handbook;
- Providing details of counselling services in the College student diary;
- Providing students and parents/carers with information regarding counselling services at parent/carer information evenings;
- Providing information regarding adolescent development in the College newsletter on an ongoing basis;
- Counsellor involvement in the College's Pastoral Care Program:
  - Administering mental health screening tools in Years 8 & 11 to identify students at risk
  - Attendance at camps/retreats in a supportive role
  - Presentations to Year Groups as required e.g. friendships
  - Arranging external support services to present to staff and students e.g. Diabetes Australia, CANTEEN, Autism Spectrum
  - Home visits when appropriate with Principal consent

- Counselling sessions will focus on being supportive and offering problem centred outcomes. If appropriate, the counsellor may take a joint approach and include other staff.
- Parents/carers will be involved with the student's counselling when required.

## Supporting Procedures

- Students do not need a referral in order to use the College counselling services.
- Referral process:



### Students:

- Are encouraged to seek advice from the counsellor should they have concerns and require assistance;
- Are responsible for ensuring that appointments made during class time do not clash with assessments. Counselling sessions may also be held in breaks or before or after College hours; and
- Are assured of the confidential nature of the discussions between themselves and the counsellor. However at times it may be necessary for the counsellor to divulge the contents of discussions or records to the Principal if it is considered necessary for the student's welfare to discharge the College's duty of care to the student; and
- Will be consulted with regard to information provided to the student's teachers should this be necessary and appropriate.

### Parents/Carers:

- May seek advice from the counsellor on a range of issues such as educational, developmental and mental health concerns;
- Are encouraged to refer their daughter to the College's counselling services should they have concerns;
- Are assured of confidentiality of discussions held between the student, their parents/carers and the counsellor to the extent that information will only be made accessible to other College staff on an as needed basis;
- Will be included in discussions, along with their daughter regarding referrals to external professionals e.g. psychologists, paediatricians, psychiatrists, speech pathologists; and
- Will be provided with a list of suitable practitioners. Counsellors will facilitate referrals upon request and will be entitled to receive reports from the external practitioner.

**Teachers:**

- Are encouraged to refer students to the College's counselling services should they have concerns;
- Are encouraged to discuss concerns they may have, regarding individual students in their class who are attending counselling.

**Pastoral Leaders and Director of Pastoral Care:**

- Are encouraged to refer students to the College's counselling services should they have concerns;
- Work collaboratively with the counsellors to provide support to students.

**Counsellors:**

- Where necessary and appropriate, will inform parents/ carers of the nature of the counselling services involving their daughter, having regard to confidentiality;
- Where necessary and appropriate, may discuss the student's circumstances with the student's teachers, having regard to confidentiality;
- Work collaboratively with the Pastoral Leaders and Director of Pastoral Care to provide support to students and to deliver an effective Pastoral Care Program;
- Will provide general feedback to the student's Pastoral Leader on an as needed basis;
- Will report to the Director of Pastoral Care regularly to provide general feedback on counselling services within the College and specifically on individual matters on an as needed basis;
- In the case of a mandatory report will inform the College Principal/Deputy Principal prior to the report being made to the Department of Family and Community Services;
- Maintain appropriate records including details of the student's name, the date of each session, those present at the session and a brief summary of the main issues discussed;
- Maintain records of meetings and/or telephone conversations regarding the student with parents, staff and external specialists; and
- Acknowledge that all records written made by them remain the property of the College. Access to counselling records will only be provided where appropriate legal requirements are met.

**Implementation**

This policy is implemented through a combination of:

- Staff training in identifying vulnerable students and effective referral processes;
- Student and parent/carer education and information;
- Development of a culture of awareness where students look out for other students and encourage each other to seek help;
- Effective referral management within and outside the College community;
- Effective communication and incident notification procedures; and
- Effective record keeping procedures.