



STUDENT COUNSELLING SERVICES POLICY

Statement of Context and Purpose

Huntingtower provides counselling to assist students to deal with common wellbeing issues that may interfere their educational or personal development.

The objective of the School's counselling services is to provide a safe and confidential forum, accessible to any student, which will support student welfare by empowering students to deal with issues and meet life's challenges in a constructive and positive way.

The counselling services align with the School's commitment to:

- Promote the physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of students
- Promote, nurture and protect healthy relationships among members of the School community
- Educate students towards self-directed constructive behaviour that builds positive wellbeing

This policy outlines the process and operations of the School's counselling services for the benefit of students, parents and staff. The counselling services are primarily provided and managed by the School Counsellors with updates provided to the Head of Wellbeing and the Principal, as necessary.

Application

All currently enrolled students may access the School's counselling services in accordance with this Policy.

By accessing the School's counselling services, students and their parents' consent to information gathered through those services being collected, disclosed and used by the School (and in particular by those who provide counselling and wellbeing services) in accordance with this Policy.

Scope

Within a school environment, students may experience a wide range of behavioural, emotional, social and psychological issues that, if left untreated, may jeopardise their wellbeing and learning. The School's counselling services may be accessed by students for dealing with a broad variety of issues, including:

- Low mood or symptoms of worry, anxiety or depression
- School-based anxiety, stress or school refusal
- Bullying issues
- Relationship issues and friendship or social problems
- Grief and loss
- Anger management
- Gender identity and sexuality issues
- Loneliness, general wellbeing issues; and
- Assertiveness and communication skills training

Huntingtower provides professional short-term counselling services before review and discharge to an appropriate external professional for longer-term or specialised care. Short-term counselling is designed to provide timely, goal-focussed support for students experiencing challenges that may affect their wellbeing or learning. These services are brief in duration, typically involving a limited number of sessions (approximately 8-12 sessions) and are guided by evidence-based practices.

Primary treatment within a school setting will typically not be appropriate for major mental illnesses and will be referred externally for appropriate psychological support. These may include but are not limited to:

- Repeated self-harming behaviours
- Suicidal ideation
- Severe depression
- Complex grief
- Personality disorders
- Eating disorders

If secondary support (e.g., monitoring and reinforcing existing treatment approaches) for these conditions and symptoms is being sought through the School's counselling services or elsewhere in the School, the support should be part of an established support plan for the student that has been developed and provided by the external professional.

Note: In instances where self-injury is a concern, staff must follow the School's [Self-Injury Guidelines](#).

Consent

The School cannot provide counselling services to a student under the age of 16 years unless it has the informed consent of either the student's parent/guardian or if they are deemed as a competent minor. The School will not provide counselling services to a student where the student is unwilling to participate.

Students aged 16 years and over are able to provide their own consent for counselling services.

Procedures

Referral to the School's counselling services

There are several avenues of referral to the School's counselling service. It is a requirement that all students referred to the School's counselling service have indicated their willingness to engage in counselling services (except where the student is deemed at risk).

Where a student is deemed 'at risk' (self-harm at school, expression of suicidal ideation or behaviours, imminent risk of homelessness) the student must be brought to the attention of a member of the counselling team for a risk assessment. This is regardless of whether the student has expressed their willingness to engage with a counsellor.

Students may be referred to the School's counselling services in one of three ways: staff referral, self-referral and parent referral. These are explained below.

Staff Referrals

- Staff who have concerns about the wellbeing of a student should share these with the Year Level Coordinator/Head of Junior School, who will then discuss any actions or strategies which need to be taken (e.g. behaviour management plan, informal wellbeing discussions) and determine whether or not to refer the student to the School's counselling services. This allows oversight of the wellbeing needs of all students for whom they are responsible
- Staff may also seek general advice from the School Counsellors regarding appropriate support for the student concerned
- In the Junior School, all referrals to the Counsellors are made in conjunction with the classroom teacher and Head of Junior School. Counselling consent letters need to be signed by the parent/guardian and returned to the Head of Junior School before Counselling commences.
- For students under the age of 16 years, where possible, the YLC will notify parents/guardians that their child has been referred to the School Counsellors. The counsellors will arrange for parents/guardians to sign counselling consent letters.
- For students over the age of 16 years, the Year Level Coordinator will make referrals to the Counsellors. The Counsellors will explain confidentiality and consent to the students and will have the students sign their own consent for counselling letter.
- After counselling has commenced, the Counsellors will determine what communication is required to be shared with other staff members to ensure a comprehensive student-focused, supportive and well-being centred approach.

Student self-referrals

- The purpose of the student self-referral path is to ensure that a student's right to protect their health information is respected and to ensure that students are not prevented from seeking counselling if they reasonably want to protect their privacy
- Students may self-refer by emailing the School Counsellors directly.
- Counselling sessions can be of an ad hoc or minor nature when they are sought for singular assistance with a minor issue, with no intention for recurring sessions or follow up.
- Counselling sessions can also be ongoing and if so, informed consent will be obtained.
- Students over the age of 16 years may refer themselves to the School's counselling services without the need for parental consent. However, where possible the Counsellors will encourage that parents/guardians are notified that counselling support is occurring.
- If a student under the age of 16 years does not wish to seek or otherwise does not receive, parental consent, the following process will apply.
 - The School will determine whether the student is a competent minor capable of consenting to counselling services without a parent's consent
 - Competent minors are young people under the age of 16 years who are capable of providing informed consent to undergo counselling.
 - In assessing whether a student is a competent minor, the School considers whether the student can understand the following:
 - The nature of the proposed psychological service
 - The benefits and risks of the proposed psychological service
 - Consequences of receiving or not receiving the proposed psychological service
 - Nature of consent and what it means to give and withdraw consent; and
 - Limits to confidentiality
- A [Student Competent Minor Assessment Form](#) must be completed for this purpose by at least the Principal or the Principal's Delegate. The Principal or the Principal's Delegate will be responsible for any final decision whether a student qualifies as a competent minor and must sign the completed Student Competent Minor Assessment Form
- Students who are over 16 years of age and have no cognitive impairment, will usually be regarded as competent minors

- Where a student is under 16 years of age and not assessed to be a competent minor, the School's counselling services will not be made available without parental consent except where the relevant services being provided is urgently required to ensure the care, safety and welfare of a student

Parent Referrals

- Requests by parents for the intervention of the School's counselling services should be made through the Year Level Coordinator/Classroom Teacher/. This ensures that the Year Level Coordinator/Classroom Teacher remains the main point of contact for parents with regard to student wellbeing issues and allows oversight of the wellbeing needs of all students for whom they are responsible
- Staff who are contacted by a parent about a referral to counselling for their child shall direct that request to the Year Level Coordinator/Classroom Teacher

Renewed referrals

If a student ceases or discontinues counselling for a period of one year or greater and is seeking to be re-referred or after ceasing counselling a new referral is made for different issue, a new informed consent form must be obtained from the student's parents or (if the student is an adult or a competent minor) the student.

Referrals to External Services

Where appropriate, referrals will be made by the Counsellor to external service providers on a need's basis, with the consent of the student. Referrals to external services will be discussed with the student and a rationale provided. Unless contraindicated, parents/carers will be included in these discussions prior to a formal referral being made to an external service.

Confidentiality

Discussions held between the student and the School Counsellor are confidential to the extent that information will only be made accessible by the School Counsellor to other relevant staff, external agencies and/or parents/carers as required to meet their legal duty of care.

Issues raised by students with the School Counsellor will be treated as confidential as best practice, unless a limit to confidentiality arises. In this regard:

- The School Counsellor is bound by law and by applicable professional standards and codes of conduct to maintain client confidentiality when collecting, recording, storing, disseminating or disposing of client information; and
- The school is required to comply with the Australian Privacy Principles in the *Privacy Act 1988* (Cth) and the *Health Records Act 2001* (Vic), as amended or replaced from time to time

If a School Counsellor deems a student at risk of harm to self, to others or from others, the School Counsellor will be required to break confidentiality (with or without the student's consent) and inform relevant staff and/or agencies and/or parents/guardians. The need to break confidentiality will be communicated with the student as soon as practical.

Where appropriate, the School Counsellor will encourage students to give consent for relevant details to be passed on, particularly to their parents, the Principal or Year Level Coordinator/Classroom Teacher.

However, the School Counsellor will always make it clear that whilst the decision to provide consent is up to the student, there are limits to confidentiality.

The School Counsellor must immediately notify the Principal or the Principal's Delegate (or if the concern is about the Principal, the Board) and make any external report required by law, if they become aware of concerns about any of the following issues in relation to a student:

- Child abuse or reportable conduct
- Significant risks of self-harm or suicidal ideation
- Serious or significant risks to the care, safety and welfare of students (including harassment or bullying)
- Serious or significant risks to the safety and wellbeing of staff
- Any unlawful activity or misconduct of a serious nature that relates to the functions or activities of the school
- Involvement or intended involvement in criminal activity
- Matters requiring mandatory reports under the *Children, Youth and Families Act 2005* (Vic) or the *Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005* (Vic)

The School Counsellor is also required to disclose information relating to student counselling matters with other School Counsellors, the Principal or the Principal's Delegate, to share professional experience, determine the best approach for that particular student and to allow oversight on how the School's counselling services are managed. Such disclosures will be on a confidential and need to know basis, with student safety being the School's paramount consideration.

Counselling Sessions

Counselling sessions will focus on offering solution-focussed support in a caring and empathic environment.

Counselling sessions are held during class time, recess or lunchtime; and may occur before or after school at the discretion and availability of the School Counsellor. The School Counsellor will endeavour to ensure that the same subject class is not used regularly for counselling sessions. It is the student's responsibility to ensure that appointments do not clash with VCE assessment tasks. Counselling sessions will take place in the HUB.

Counselling Records

Appropriate, professional records must be maintained, including date of session, those present at the session and a brief summary of the main issues discussed. Records must be kept of any interactions completed in the service of the student, such as phone calls to parents, staff members and external agencies; email communication; and meetings with relevant parties.

The School Counsellors may create counselling notes and records by hand and electronic form. These notes and records are created on behalf of and for the School and will be:

- If made in writing, marked as strictly confidential and stored in securely locked files at the School
- If made in electronic form, stored in secure password protected electronic form on the School's database; and
- Stored separately to the student general file

Subject to any exceptions in this Policy or requirements at law, counselling notes and records will only be accessible to the School Counsellors, the Principal or the Principal's Delegate. Such access will only occur:

- Where authorised or required by law
- For a purpose mentioned in this Policy or a related purpose; or
- To ensure that the School is meeting its duty of care to students and other members of the School community

All counselling notes and records that were made whilst a student was under the age of 18 must be retained at least until the student attains the age of 25 (or for such longer period as may be determined by the School). Counselling records must not be deleted without the Principal's written permission.

Involvement of other staff

Where necessary and appropriate, the School Counsellor may discuss the student's circumstances with the student's teachers, having regard to confidentiality and with the student's permission. Teachers are encouraged to discuss concerns they may have, regarding individual students in their class who are attending counselling.

Before students attend school camp, overnights or other identified activities, School Counsellors will meet with the teacher in charge and assist in the development of Camp Management Plans, where necessary. This will assist camp staff in the care of these students.

Information-sharing with parents

Depending on the issue and the age of the student, involvement from parents may be preferable or necessary. This is particularly the case in relation to obtaining consent for children who are not competent minors to access the School's counselling services. However, where there is a concern for the immediate care, safety or welfare of a student, then the School and its staff must act in the student's best interests, which may override any need for parental consent prior to an intervention.

Similarly, there may be occasions where, consistent with the School's duty of care and a student's right to privacy, it is not appropriate that the School share information obtained through counselling services with a student's parents.

Information-sharing with other ISEs

Huntingtower is a prescribed Information Sharing Entity (ISE) meaning that, where legislated requirements are met, it is able to share confidential information with other ISEs to promote child wellbeing or safety under the CISS or FVISS (refer to Child & Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme Policy).

Concerns about counselling sessions

If the appropriateness of the student's behaviour towards a School Counsellor is identified as being a concern, the School Counsellor must notify the Principal or the Principal's Delegate in writing. The Principal/Delegate will determine an appropriate response in consultation with the School Counsellor. The School may require the student or their parents to agree to certain conditions being imposed before any further counselling services are provided, e.g., reassignment of the student to a different School Counsellor or having a third-party present during the session.

If a student or parent/carer has a concern about the conduct of a counselling session, they are encouraged to raise that concern with the Principal or the Principal's Delegate.

Ceasing counselling

Counselling services may be concluded under the following circumstances:

- The student no longer wishes to participate in counselling
- The short-term support offered has reached its conclusion
- The student's presenting concerns have been appropriately addressed
- The student requires ongoing or specialised support beyond the School's scope
- The School Counsellor determines that counselling is no longer necessary or beneficial

- The short-term service has a level of flexibility and may be anything from approximately 8-12 sessions, weekly, fortnightly or longer
- Upon ceasing, the Counsellor will:
 - Communicate this via phone to parents/carers within 48 hours
 - Provide a follow-up email with potential referral and recommendations within 72 hours

Staff access to counselling services

The School's counselling services are primarily intended for students. Staff who have concerns about the wellbeing of a staff member or their own wellbeing, should share these concerns with the Principal or the Principal's Delegate, who will then refer the staff member to the School's Employee Assistance Program. Staff members can obtain the contact details for this free and confidential service at any time from the Human Resource's office.

Parent access to counselling services

The Principal is responsible for determining if and when parents may access the School's counselling services. As a general rule this will not be possible, as the School's paramount consideration is the care, safety and welfare of enrolled students.

Responsibilities

Provision of the School's counselling services

The School's counselling services will be administered with regard to a student's care, safety and welfare – being the School's paramount consideration. In delivering services, the School Counsellor will act in accordance with the following principles:

- Employ evidence-based approaches in which they have been appropriately trained
- Take part in clinical supervision in accordance with the requirements of their professional associations or registration bodies
- Take part in ongoing professional development in accordance with the requirements of their professional associations or registration bodies
- Ensure training in student safety, mandatory reporting and professional boundaries is completed annually or otherwise, as frequently as required in accordance with the School's policies and procedures
- Comply with all school policies and procedures and in particular those regarding the care, safety and welfare of students
- Make referrals to other health professionals when the needs of a student are beyond their professional capability

Counselling services will focus on working with students to:

- Build a positive but professional relationship with students based upon openness, trust and respect
- Encourage students to make their own decisions and providing appropriate information and assistance
- Assist students to develop skills in communication, problem solving, conflict resolution and decision making; and
- Encourage students to accept responsibility for their actions and future

The role of the School counsellor

The School employs School Counsellors to assist it in meeting the educational needs of students and guiding them towards their full academic potential. The School also expects that the School Counsellors assist the School in discharging its duty of care to students, which requires that reasonable

steps be taken to prevent foreseeable risks of physical and mental harm to students. The School Counsellors will accordingly:

- Prior to the commencement of any counselling services, advise the student of the School Counsellor's role, the relationship between the School Counsellor and other school staff members, the purpose for which any information in the course of counselling is collected, the safe storage of such information and the limits to confidentiality
- Confirm that the student has understood and been provided in writing the matters raised in paragraph above. The School Counsellor must keep a detailed record of this. In the absence of this occurring, counselling services must not commence, the student shall be provided an external referral
- Record initial intake information, including:
 - The date of counselling (including the date of initial contact)
 - The reason for the student's referral
 - Confirmation whether the student's parents are aware that the student is accessing counselling services and if not the reasons for this
 - Confirmation that any limits to confidentiality have been explained
 - Relevant history (personal, family, medical)
 - Any observations and assessments, strategies recommended; and
 - Agreed goals for the student's wellbeing (including whether there will be follow-up counselling)
- Determine the seriousness of the issue
- Determine if a referral to an outside agency is required; this will often be the case where primary treatment or ongoing therapy/counselling may be required
- Make referrals to and liaise with outside agencies as required
- If required, develop a treatment plan which includes a statement of the problem, the goal of treatment, the steps required to achieve the goal and timeframes for review
- Notify relevant staff (including the Principal or Principal's Delegate, relevant Head of School, Year Level Coordinator/Classroom Teacher) and the student's parent/guardian (if appropriate) if further action is required. The School may require the student or their parent/guardian to agree to certain conditions being imposed before any further counselling services are provided
- Notify the Wellbeing Team of concerns about a student where appropriate and relevant, particularly if additional funding or learning support may be sought
- Record any case closure information which includes a synopsis of the referral and course of action taken, the reason why counselling ceased, the outcome and any aftercare plans or external referrals made

In addition to complying with the School's policies and procedures and any relevant professional standards, procedures and codes of conduct applicable to the School Counsellor's profession, the School Counsellor must behave in accordance with the following standards:

- Counselling services, whether formal or otherwise, will not take place away from the School, outside school grounds without the Principal's or Principal's Delegate prior written permission
- All communication with students must have a valid professional context
- It is recommended that School Counsellors should not communicate with students outside of school hours unless necessary. If electronic contact is necessary and has a valid professional context, School Counsellors may only use their school email
- School Counsellors must not communicate with students using personal devices or private email or social media accounts
- During a counselling session, School Counsellors must not sit or position themselves in any manner which might be construed as inappropriate or unnecessarily close
- Physical contact between the School Counsellors and student is inappropriate, beyond what might be considered normal, i.e., shaking hands

Related Documents

- [Child Safety and Wellbeing Policy](#)
- [Student Wellbeing and Engagement Policy](#)
- [Student Wellbeing and Engagement Guidelines](#)
- [Parent Code of Conduct Policy](#)
- Decision-Making Responsibilities for Students Policy
- Ministerial Order No. 1359, Child Safe Standards – Managing the Risk of Child Abuse in Schools and School Boarding Facilities
- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth)
- Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- [Four Critical Actions for Schools](#)
- [The Victorian Teaching Profession Code of Conduct](#)

Communication

This Policy is available to staff, parents/carers, students and the school community via the School's website. In addition, relevant aspects of this Policy may be raised at relevant meetings.

Evaluation

The Principal is primarily responsible for monitoring Huntingtower's overall compliance with this Policy, which will be reviewed as part of Huntingtower's policy review cycle (and otherwise as and when required).

Authorisation

This Policy was authorised by the Principal in August 2022

Reviewed: August 2025

Date of next review: August 2027