

## What is the ICSS?

The Independent Counselling Support for Schools is a service that has been available to all grant aided post primary schools since the beginning of September 2007. The service is funded by the Department of Education. New Life Counselling has been responsible for the delivery of this service in over 180 post primary schools across Northern Ireland since September 2009.

## Who is New Life Counselling?

New Life Counselling is an organisation with over 15 years experience of offering counselling support in schools. It believes in a society that actively promotes positive emotional health and wellbeing and gives everyone the freedom to grow, and believes that excellent counselling and therapeutic support services contribute to this vision. It is therefore committed to:

- Employing only well qualified and skilled counsellors
- Offering a safe and appropriately confidential service
- Working in partnership with schools, parents and community groups in the best interest of its clients

## What is counselling?

Counselling involves meeting with a professionally qualified counsellor to talk in confidence about things that are bothering or concerning us. People speak to counsellors about many different things, for example worries about relationships, stress, worries about schoolwork, loss and bereavement, traumatic events, difficult changes and countless other things.

## What does a counsellor do?

Counsellors are trained to listen carefully in a way that makes it easy to talk to them. They are especially good at being able to listen without judgement, which helps people sort out their thoughts and feelings about whatever is concerning them.

## Why have a counsellor in school?

Young people benefit from counselling in the same way and for the same reasons as adults. School counsellors have experience of working with young people and understand many of the issues that trouble them. Although the school counsellor works closely with the school in safeguarding young people, not being a member of the school staff means that they can offer an impartial listening ear, no matter what the young person wishes to discuss. Offering counselling in schools means we can often work preventatively by offering early support, often preventing more serious difficulties later on.

## How long will counselling last?

We aim to offer counselling for as long as it is needed. This may be a few sessions, or longer term. It is reviewed regularly between the counsellor and young person.

## Where and when does it take place?

Usually, a small, private room is made available in the school during the day. Sessions last up to fifty minutes, and appointment times are varied so that time is not lost from any one subject.

## Can I support the counselling work?

Yes and we welcome this. Our experience shows that the most helpful thing a parent can do is to show an acceptance of counselling as a normal and useful activity, and to show an interest if their son / daughter wishes to talk about it, but not to press them if they don't. We acknowledge that this isn't an easy task, and it is quite natural for parents to feel anxious about what may be being said in the sessions. It is always our hope that talking with one of us will lead to greater openness with yourselves, but you may need to allow a little time for this to happen.

## What if my child refuses to have counselling?

The decision about whether or not to take up the offer of counselling is entirely voluntary for young people just as it would be for an adult.

## If my child wants to see a counsellor does that mean I am failing as a parent?

Absolutely not! We all experience occasions when it feels hard to speak to those closest to us about things which are bothering us. Often this can be because we don't want to worry those we love most, or because we want help thinking things through with someone unbiased. The counsellor will not be judging you or your child, but looking to help them find their way through whatever is troubling them.

## How are referrals made to the counselling service?

Referrals are made through the school's pastoral system to the counsellor, but the request may come from you, your child or a teacher. If a teacher makes the request we expect them to speak with the child or young person about why they think this may be a good idea. If interest is shown they will then suggest that it is discussed with you at home.

## Data protection procedures and evaluation

All information about counselling work undertaken is kept securely by the counselling service in line with current data protection regulations. After the counselling has finished your child will be sent an evaluation form that they can complete anonymously and return. This lets us know how well we are helping the children and young people that we see. If there is any cause for complaint, you or your child are welcome to contact the counsellor or the regional manager who will try to resolve any issues of concern.

“we're listening”

## Is it confidential?

At the start of the counselling process the counsellor and young person enter into an agreement that clearly defines both the confidentiality and the limits to confidentiality of the counselling process. The agreement says:

*"I will not talk to anyone outside of this room about anything we talk about in here unless:*

*We agree that I should do so because it would be helpful to you if I did OR*

*i. You have been hurt, harmed or treated in a way that is inappropriate*

*ii. There is a risk of harm to you or to anyone else*

*iii. I hear anything that makes me think the law has been or will be broken*

*If it becomes necessary to talk to anyone else, we will discuss this first, and we will talk about all the things that are likely to happen when we do."*

Counselling is a time when young people can talk about concerns without fear of them being discussed elsewhere. This includes not discussing the work with parents, unless the young person requests or gives consent for this. This can be hard for parents to accept at times, but ensuring the confidentiality of the work is crucial for establishing trust so that the young people feel confident to speak openly and freely about what is concerning them.

All counsellors receive supervision of their work, to ensure the quality of their practice, and these sessions involve the anonymous presentation of casework.

## What if I don't want my child to receive counselling?

If a child or young person requests counselling and is able to understand what is involved in the process, then they have the right to access counselling. Parents and carers may not deny them this right. We would, however, prefer that we have your support for the work, and we are always happy to talk with you about any concerns that you may have about the idea of counselling.

## Please note

The advice given in this leaflet is intended to be helpful to most people. It does not replace the direct advice of a healthcare professional or counsellor. It is only a general guide and cannot deal with all possible situations nor can it be specific to any one individual. If you or someone you know needs help please contact your GP as soon as possible to obtain further help.

For further information please speak to the school counsellor, or contact New Life Counselling.

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counselling

# Hello.

We're New Life Counselling,  
we're here to help you.

**Independent Counselling  
Service for Schools**

Information for parents