



GEMS Winchester School Dubai



Counselling Policy

Person(s) Responsible: Senior Counsellor

Approved by ELT: August 2023

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Contents

1. [Our Mission Statement](#)
2. [Rationale](#)
3. [Our Aims for Counselling](#)
4. [Counselling – Practice](#)
5. [The Role of the School Counsellor](#)
6. [Confidentiality](#)
7. [Referral & Evaluation](#)
8. [Responsive Services](#)
9. [Counselling Sessions](#)
10. [Procedures for Obtaining Parental Consent](#)
11. [Record Keeping](#)
12. [Long-Term/Intensive Counselling](#)
13. [Appendix](#)

1. Our Mission Statement

At GEMS Winchester School Dubai (WSD), the counselling service extends to all the individuals who are a part of the school environment; students, teachers and parents. Like physical health, everyone has mental health and we need to take care of it. The counselling service provides a safe and nurturing approach to all students to explore their barriers and challenges and develop skills needed to overcome them. The goal of the program is to enable all students to achieve a measure of success in school and develop into contributing members of the society.

WSD aims to ensure positive mental health to all students and encourage the students to reach their full potential by providing a counselling program that is comprehensive, preventive in design and developmental in nature. Our counselling program values the individuality of each student and nurture his/her educational, social, emotional and personal needs.

[Click here to return to the Contents page](#)

2. Rationale

Students of any age can be at a risk of experiencing poor mental health and poor wellbeing. Students face anxiety and stress caused by increasing demands of examination, adjusting to the new modern school environment and experiencing new country and culture.

All of these can have a big impact on their mental health. Unmet Mental health needs can pose serious barriers to social and educational development. The school counselling service is a necessary part of the education system and can provide required education, interventions and referral services to students, parents and teachers. Implementation of counselling program has a positive impact on student achievement.

[Click here to return to the Contents page](#)

3. Our Aims for Counselling

At WSD, we aim to:

- Provide a safe and nurturing environment
- Advocate for equity and success for every student
- Treat every student with respect as a unique individual
- Enhance the awareness of mental health in school, aiming to remove stigma
- Identify students at risk of social, emotional and psychological concerns
- Respond to the direct and immediate concerns of students with methods which include, but are not limited to Individual counselling, group counselling, crisis counselling and referral or consultation with families, teachers or other specialists
- Support students through individual intervention program in dealing with bullying, family crisis, change, peer pressure, friendships, anger, academic expectations and issues surrounding their mental health
- Provide resources, support and encouragement to students, parents and teachers to access counselling service
- Protect confidentiality of information received in the counselling relationship as specified in written policies and applicable ethical standards

[Click here to return to the Contents page](#)

4. Counselling - Practice

Counselling service provides an opportunity for students to talk in confidence about things that are affecting their emotions, feelings and behaviours. The school counsellor is a qualified and trained member of the staff.

The school counsellor will hold necessary license from relevant authority to work within a school setting. Counsellor supports the students to gain a better understanding of themselves and their situation to help them resolve their problems.

The development and implementation of these programs requires leadership from well-trained, highly competent school counsellors and includes a collaborative effort with school administrators, classroom teachers, school staff and community stakeholders.

[Click here to return to the Contents page](#)

5. The Role of School Counsellor

The role of the school counsellor is as follows:

- Ensure student wellbeing is the number one priority
- Manage their emotions and develop interpersonal skills
- Offer short term counselling to students
- Complete referrals for long term support
- Encourage academic achievement strategies
- Advocate for students at Individual Education plan meetings and other student focused meetings
- Adheres to ethical standards of the profession and framework established by the UAE government and KHDA/DSIB
- Maintains profession competence through education, training program and supervision

[Click here to return to the Contents page](#)

6. Confidentiality

It is the school counsellor's responsibility to respect the right to privacy of those with whom they enter a counselling relationship and to provide an environment of trust and confidence. Therefore, the counsellor will:

- Explain the meaning and limits of confidentiality to students in developmentally appropriate terms
- Provide appropriate disclosure and informed consent regarding the counselling relationship and confidentiality.

The school Counsellor's primary obligation regarding confidentiality is towards the student, but they must balance that obligation with an understanding of the guardian's legal rights to the guiding voice in their children's lives. It is important to remember that:

- Confidentiality is an ethical and legal term ascribed to the information communicated within the counselling relationship, and it is to be maintained unless keeping that information confidential leads to foreseeable harm.
- They must inform students and the family of the limits to confidentiality

Reasons for breaking confidentiality are but not limited to:

- a student is in danger of harming themselves, another individual, or if a student is in danger of being harmed by others.

Exception to confidentiality exist, and the students should be informed when situations arise in which school counsellors have a responsibility to disclose information obtained in counselling relationships to others to protect students, themselves or other individuals. These include:

- Where a student is at risk of significant harm, the counsellor will initiate the school safeguarding procedures and consult with the DSL and SLT (refer to WSD Safeguarding & Child Protection policy)
- HOY and tutors are aware of students accessing the service but will not have information to the session details
- To keep personal notes, separate from educational records and not disclose their contents except when privacy exception exists

[Click here to return to the Contents page](#)

7. Referral & Evaluation

At WSD, the following people can refer:

- Any student can self-refer
- The Tutor, the Head of Year, Director of Pastoral, Assistant Principal, or Designated Safeguarding Leads will refer any pupil for counselling. A referral form will always accompany with parent consent
- The SLT team may refer a pupil to the counselling service against their (student) wishes due to their behavior. The students referred will be offered 1-2 counselling session with the counsellor. The student can than agree or disagree for another session with the counsellor
- Parents can refer their ward for counselling by meeting with the school counsellor
- A member of the staff can self-refer by contacting the school counsellor

For further information about the process of referral, please see the flow chart in [Appendix One](#).

[Click here to return to the Contents page](#)

8. Responsive Services

The school counsellors should be available and responsive to special or unexpected needs of students and parents/guardians. Thus, the purpose of the responsive services component is to work with students whose personal circumstances, concerns, or problems have the potential to interfere with healthy social/emotional, academic, and career development.

Issues that students may face include;

- Academic challenges
- Educational and career decision making
- Family loss
- Relationships
- School attendance
- Stress
- Substance abuse
- Physical abuse
- Neglect

- Suicide

As a result, there is continuing need for individual counselling, small group counselling, crisis intervention, consultation, and referral.

Responsive services address students' immediate needs and concerns and are delivered through prevention and intervention activities such as:

- Individual/Group counselling to assist students in resolving or coping with personal/social, academic, and developmental concerns.
- Consultation and collaboration with parents and teachers to provide resources that enhance or address the needs of students.
- Crisis Counselling, which involves prevention, intervention and follow-up services to help students and families in emergency situations.

Furthermore, the counselling team provide additional services, such as:

- Conflict Mediations
- Consultations and Collaboration with school staff
- Referrals and Community Resources
- Parent Workshops

[Click here to return to the Contents page](#)

9. Counselling Session

Counselling sessions will last 40 minutes in one of the counselling rooms. Students referred will be eligible for 6 sessions and a review of the sessions will take place after 6 weeks. School counsellors will ensure that appointments are scheduled at a convenient time for the students to ensure their learning is not impacted.

While our team of counsellors tries to meet the needs of all students in a timely manner, there may be times when there is a huge demand on the service and it may result in waiting lists, which are prioritised by the level of need.

[Click here to return to the Contents page](#)

10. Procedures for Obtaining Parental Consent

It is important to get appropriate parent consent when undertaking a one-to-one session.

- Parental Permission/Consent must be obtained prior to any sessions commencing for students under 16 years of age.
- If students are 16- or 17-years-old, school counsellor will carefully consider whether parental consent is needed after consulting with a Designated Safeguarding Leader, and/or the Principal.

A copy of the standard letter template sent to families can be found in [Appendix Two](#).

[Click here to return to the Contents page](#)

11. Record Keeping

The school counsellor will keep a formal record of pupils who access the service with a brief description of the presenting issue. Where a student is referred a referral form and parent consent where needed will be kept in the individual file. It is important to note that:

- Counsellors shall comply with Regulations of information sharing and Confidentiality of Student-Disclosed Information,
- Records of personal/social counselling shall be kept separate from a student's educational records and shall not be disclosed to third parties without prior parental consent, or as otherwise provided by law.
- Statistical data will be annually reported keeping student's identity confidential.

[Click here to return to the Contents page](#)

12. Long-Term/Intensive Counselling

The school counsellor shall refer parents to an appropriate agency or private mental health care provider for long-term intensive counselling. A resource list of those agencies or mental health providers available in the community will be provided to parents/caregivers.

The school counsellor shall consult with and/or work collaboratively with outside counsellors who are conducting long-term intensive counselling services for students, when warranted.

[Click here to return to the Contents page](#)

Appendix One: Referral Process Flow Chart for Counselling



[Click here to return to the Contents page](#)

Appendix Two: Parent Consent Form

PARENTAL INFORMATION AND CONSENT FORM

Student Name: _____ **Year:** _____ **Date:** _____

Dear Parents,

Counsellor's support to student is available for social, emotional, academic and/or behavioral concerns at school. The counsellor is available during regular school hours to meet with parents and caregivers to support and help problem solve any concerns you might have.

We request to obtain permission for your child to receive brief counselling sessions with the school counsellor at WSD. I am currently offering –

- _____ Individual counselling session
- _____ Small group session

It is important that parents meet with the counsellor initially to provide a background history of the child's medical issues, significant life events and any other relevant information that will assist the counsellor when meeting with the child.

The Counsellor will meet with students on a short-term basis. The counselling sessions will occur during the school days at an agreed upon time with the Head of Years. The counselling will not- occur during important academic instruction or assessment.

All information is confidential and disclosed with permission except when the student is at risk of harming themselves, others or otherwise required by School Safeguarding and Child Protection Policies.

Kind Regards,

Shalini Nair

Sr. School Counsellor
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CONSENT FORM

YES, I give permission for my ward _____ to participate in Individual/Small Group Counselling Sessions.

Parent Email Id: _____ Mobile: _____

Parent Signature _____ Date: _____

School Counsellor Signature _____

[Click here to return to the Contents page](#)