

## Counselling Practice

Counselling is offered in the context of the free and informed consent of students. They can withdraw consent at any time. The Relationship Services Code of Ethics defines this as 'clients must be fully informed of what is involved and must freely give consent to participate' (Ludbrook, "Counselling and the Law", 2012: 33).

Notes and records made by the counsellors are kept securely and only the counsellors have access to this information. Only students can request access to their documentation. No teacher, SLT, Principal nor parent/caregiver are able to access this documentation without the consent of the student.

## Confidentiality When Working with the Guidance Team

The presence of counsellors in schools gives students the opportunity to seek support from trained and trusted adults in a confidential environment, as they negotiate their way through the many challenges of adolescence.

"Confidentiality is the obligation of confidence between the client and their counsellor" (Te Pahiaka Tangata: Strengthening Student Wellbeing for Success, Min. of Education, 2017). In order for the counsellor/student relationship to be of value it is imperative that students understand that what they bring to that space is confidential and privileged information, unless they give consent to particular information being disclosed. It is important to note that "children have the same rights of confidentiality as adults" (Ludbrook, "Counselling and the Law", 2012: 305). This means counsellors must keep information from the client confidential unless the client gives permission to share it or the counsellor needs to break that confidence due to safety reasons.

The NZAC Code of Ethics is clear that there are some exceptions to confidentiality in the counselling space. "Exceptions to confidentiality occur when: there is **serious danger in the immediate or foreseeable future to the client or others**" (NZAC Code of Ethics, rev. 2020; Te Pahiaka Tangata: Strengthening Student Wellbeing for Success, Min. of Education, 2017)

When first meeting with a student, the Guidance Counsellor will explain the limits of confidentiality. This conversation is along the lines of "all of our conversations are confidential unless we have serious concerns for your immediate safety, or for someone else's safety, and then we will need to talk about involving someone else who can help".

In these cases, breaking confidentiality may involve contacting parents and/or it may involve contacting other agencies that are able to provide support and intervention such as mental health services; the police; or Oranga Tamariki. Only the pertinent information will be passed on to those people to whom it is absolutely necessary.

For Guidance Counsellors, balancing safety and risk can be challenging. It is widely understood that being a teenager often includes experimenting with some "risky" behaviour -

sometimes this is pushing the boundaries at home, sometimes it is choosing friends that parents may not approve of, sometimes it is experimenting with drugs or alcohol, sex or self harm. While there are times that this behaviour meets the threshold for disclosure, that is not always the case.

Adolescents often don't want their parents to know about their conversations with a Guidance Counsellor, however we regularly encourage students to have some level of involvement from their parents.

It is important to note that other staff at the school do have a responsibility to inform parents if they have concerns about the learning progress or social aspects of a student. That is, staff that are not Guidance Counsellors, are not bound by the same rules of confidentiality.

### **Supervision of Guidance Counsellors**

Counsellors, along with their supervisors, monitor and maintain their fitness to practise in an effective way. Counsellors may discuss, in supervision, information received in counselling as part of the normal management of confidentiality. All counsellors are registered members of their relevant professional bodies.

### **Attendance**

Students may attend counselling at school without a caregiver's knowledge. This is recorded in our attendance system as a version of 'present'. It may be recorded as an 'internal appointment'. Either way, to caregivers this will just appear as present. If attendance in class is an issue, the teacher and/or Dean may be in contact with the student and family.

Below are some useful links that explain further the Guidance Counsellor role and the expectations of the counselling relationship.

The NZ Association of Counsellors Code of Ethics

[NZAC Code of Ethics](#)

Pastoral Care Guidelines document - Te Pakiaka Tangata, issued by the Ministry of Education

[Te Pakiaka Tangata](#)

"Walking a Tightrope" - an article published by NZAC which describes some of the issues faced by school guidance counsellors

[Walking a tightrope NZAC article.pdf](#)