



**Counselling at**  
**The Stoke Poges School**



## Frequently asked questions

### How experienced is the counsellor at The Stoke Poges School?

Mrs Carole Powell is a qualified Person Centred counsellor. She has successfully completed a three and half year training course, gaining a Certificate in Counselling Skills and a Diploma in the Theory and Practice of Counselling.

Mrs Powell is a registered member of the accrediting body for counsellors, the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and the professional body, Counselling for Children and Young People (CCYP). It is only possible to become a registered member of these organisations if the counsellor is suitably qualified and has passed the registration exam. She worked for Place2Be, a charity offering counselling in primary and secondary schools throughout the country for over three years and during that time she received extensive training with the organisation. Mrs Powell regularly attends workshops and training sessions to further develop her skills and knowledge of counselling children and young people.

*'Several parents told me how much they appreciate the high level of care which adults show towards pupils, singling out the work of your school's counsellor for particular commendation. (Ofsted report - Oct 2017).*

### How is a child referred for counselling?

The Stoke Poges School staff pride themselves on the caring, nurturing ethos that exists within the school.

The safety and emotional wellbeing of pupils is of paramount importance and children are encouraged to share their worries or concerns with a member of staff. This is usually enough to alleviate any anxieties the child may have or to resolve emotionally upsetting situations that occur within the school. However, a member of staff, or parent, may consider

that a child's emotional needs are more complex and long-term specialised support would be beneficial.

In this instance, a referral form will be completed and given to Mrs. Powell in a sealed envelope marked confidential (the forms are available in the staffroom and reception area). Mrs Powell will evaluate the need for support against the vacant time slots she has available, and if it is possible to meet the child's needs, the parents will be invited to attend an informal meeting where the counselling process will be explained and questions can be answered.

Parents will be asked to sign a parental consent form before their child is able to commence counselling. Counselling is voluntary, a pupil can be encouraged to attend, but ultimately it is the child's choice.

As a way of measuring the outcome of the counselling sessions, the parents and the child will be invited to complete a questionnaire, which will be repeated after the child's final sessions.

### **How long will my child need to see the counsellor for and when will the sessions take place?**

This will largely depend on the needs of the child. Following the referral procedure and an initial consultation with parents, up to ten sessions will be offered. The needs of the child will then be reviewed and the sessions may continue if all parties agree it is appropriate. If the child decides they don't want to attend all the agreed number of sessions, this can be arranged by mutual consent.

The sessions will last for 45 minutes at an agreed time on a Friday, although it may be on an alternative day in exceptional circumstances. If the child is experiencing a particularly difficult time, it may be possible to arrange additional sessions during the week.

### **What about the class work my child will be missing?**

Extensive research shows that a child's emotional state of mind can be a significant barrier to learning. If a child is troubled emotionally, the

natural responses in the brain can affect the memory and the ability to learn. It has been shown that counselling can help remove this barrier to learning and the child's general wellbeing, happiness and academic performance often improves. Therefore, the benefit of counselling outweighs the impact of missing a few lessons. The class teacher will ensure that any work missed will be covered at another time.

### **Can I ask Mrs Powell about how my child's sessions are going?**

It is natural that parents want to know how their child is getting on and what their son or daughter has been talking about. The BACP code of Ethics and Practice states that *'Counselling involves a deliberately undertaken contract with clearly agreed boundaries and commitment to privacy and confidentiality. It requires explicit and informed consent.'* Although it may be difficult for parents who are curious about their child's progress, it is important to remember that confidentiality is key to a positive outcome for your child.

Mrs Powell has a duty to honour the contract she has made with her clients and if anything is disclosed to a parent or a member of staff, it will only be with the consent of the child. In line with the BACP ethical framework and code of conduct, the only exception to this would be if a disclosure was made that caused Mrs Powell to believe the child was at risk of harm, or if the child was at risk of seriously harming themselves or others. In this instance, Mrs Powell would immediately inform Ms Astley or Mrs Benians and the child would be invited to be part of that process.

The BACP code of practice requires all counsellors to receive at least 1½ hours clinical supervision each month. Counselling without supervision is unethical and can compromise the quality of the work. Mrs Powell will be supported by an accredited supervisor and the content of her work with clients may be discussed. However this will be done anonymously and details of the child or family will remain confidential.

### **Can I ask my child about the content of the counselling sessions?**

The counselling relationship is very private and personal and each child will respond differently. Some children may wish to talk to their parents about the sessions, while others may wish to keep the content of the sessions to themselves. It is important to be guided by your child and to respect their individual differences. There may be times when your child seems more upset following a counselling session and this may be because they have been dealing with painful feelings. Showing sensitivity to their distress, while also respecting their right to privacy is a difficult but important balance for parents to achieve.

### **What if my child reveals private things about my family?**

It is important that your child feels free to talk about experiences in the family that may be troubling or confusing them. It matters that you give approval for your child to talk freely to Mrs Powell. It is understandable that you might feel worried about what your child may say, however you should bear in mind that the strict code of ethics counsellors follow includes clauses about confidentiality. Mrs Powell is not there to judge you or anyone else in your family. She will be aware that she is hearing things from a child's point of view and her sole purpose is to help the child manage their difficulties and try to resolve them in a positive way. Mrs Powell has worked with children for over thirty years and has two grown up children of her own. She is well aware of the trials and tribulations family life can bring and has empathy with parents.

It may be that your child attends a series of counselling sessions and never talks about the issues concerning them, yet a positive outcome can still be achieved. Mrs Powell has witnessed many times how a child's emotional state of mind can be changed by working through difficult feelings and emotions simply through the medium of play.

### **What is the difference between Counselling and Psychotherapy?**

There is very little to differentiate the definitions of psychotherapy from the BACP definition of counselling. Some see counselling as being concerned with the prevention and de-escalation of a problem, focussing on enabling the person to develop the internal resources to cope with their difficulties more effectively. Psychotherapy is sometimes seen as being concerned with remedying mental health symptoms and problems.

### **Will it cost me anything?**

As the school values the importance of supporting children emotionally, the counselling service will be funded from the school's pupil premium budget. However, if you wish to make a contribution towards the sustainability of the service, it will be gratefully received.

### **How can I help support my child emotionally at home? Some helpful hints from Mrs Powell**

If your child has a problem, or life at home is particularly difficult, it can be hard for parents to know how to start talking to their child, which is why it is sometimes easier for the child to talk to someone else.

If you notice your child is withdrawn, unusually angry or tearful, has a loss of appetite or has trouble sleeping, it can be very helpful to simply acknowledge that you've noticed. For example, you may say, "I notice that you've had trouble getting to sleep lately," or "I've noticed that you seem much quieter on our journey to school recently, I'm wondering if something is bothering you." It is often a good idea to avoid asking a direct question such as, "What's the matter?" or "What's wrong?"

Children are often unaware that their behaviour has changed; they may be confused about the situation they face and find it difficult to put their feelings into words. They may also not want to make the situation worse by saying something that might hurt, worry or upset you. However, by acknowledging that you've noticed a change in their behaviour, it may help your child feel more comfortable and pave the way for them to share their concerns more freely. If your child

refuses to open up, it is often best to avoid adding extra pressure; let the subject go and repeat the process at another time.

You can learn a lot about how a child is feeling by observing them at play. Stressed and upset children often play fighting games with their toys. By making comments like, "I can see there's a lot of fighting going on in your game," or "It seems pretty frightening for that dinosaur," it might be a helpful way of allowing your child to say what's bothering them.

Children will often ask if you're going to tell anyone about what they've told you. Never promise not to tell, but explain that you'll only tell other people who want to help. If you suspect abuse, ring the NSPCC (0808 800 5000) or encourage the child to call ChildLine (0800 1111).

If you have any further questions or concerns about your child's emotional wellbeing, you can talk to the class teacher, Ms Astley or arrange to talk to Mrs Powell. The Stoke Poges Counselling Policy is available upon request.



