Student Counselling Service

Confidentiality and Management of Records

Introduction

This document outlines our responsibilities and practices in relation to information on clients, and explains our policies on confidentiality and the management of personal data.

Confidentiality is of paramount importance and the service strictly adheres to the ethical framework of the BACP (British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy). All counselling practitioners in the service are BACP or COSCA registered members. The BACP and COSCA codes of ethics are available online at https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/ethical-framework-for-the-counselling-professions/ and https://www.cosca.org.uk/guidance-policies/ethics.

The service is also bound by the College's policies and procedures regarding Data Protection, Child Protection and Safeguarding and Staff Conduct.

Confidentiality

The service is committed to pay careful consideration to client confidentiality and consent. Counsellors respect your right to privacy and only in certain situations will any personal information about you be passed to anyone outside the Student Counselling Service.

These exceptions are:

- Where you have given your consent to disclose information or data to a specific person, or agency.
- There is a legal obligation to do so where the counsellor would be liable to civil or criminal proceedings if the information were not disclosed.
- You, the Counsellor, or someone else is in serious danger. If the risk is believed to be sufficiently acute, the Counsellor will pass on the information, irrespective of client consent.

In most cases, the Counsellor will normally encourage you to personally pass on information to the relevant person, or agency. Consent to disclose information in most circumstances will be sought from you, if possible.

Supervision and Professional Standards

Clinical supervision is a fundamental requirement of practicing counselling. It also ensures that practitioners are practising safely and effectively. In line with the BACP

ethical framework, counsellors receive supervision from a supervisor who is independent of the College. Individual clients may therefore be discussed with clinical supervisors external to the College for reflection and advice. All identifying information is removed and the client remains anonymous in this process.

As part of this process, occasionally the Counsellor may ask permission to tape-record counselling sessions for the purpose of professional development. These sessions are anonymised and if you have any objections speak to your counsellor. You have the right to withdraw permission at any time. We will check with you at the beginning and end of each counselling session to ensure that you are happy for the recordings to take place/be kept. At any stage during a session you may ask for the recording to be stopped or destroyed. Recordings will be subject to secure storage, have limited access and will be confidentially erased after 6 months. No copies of it will be made and you are welcome to request a copy of it.

Liaising and Communication with Third Parties

In certain circumstances it may be appropriate for the Counsellor to liaise with, or write to, a third party (e.g. course tutor, faculty/senior management or doctor). In all cases, the purpose of the communication and the nature and extent of the information disclosed will normally be agreed with you prior to being made.

If any communications are received from a third party (i.e. college staff, parents or carers, friends etc.) the service will not disclose any information without your explicit permission, unless the previous noted exceptions apply. This will include whether or not you are being seen. In most cases, you will be informed of any contact from a third party, as soon as it is reasonably possible.

Record Keeping

When you register for the service you have agreed that the information provided will be entered into a filing system and will only be accessed by authorised staff of the service. This information will be retained by the College, for the specified timeframe, and will be used for the purpose of processing your enquiry, delivery of therapeutic counselling support and may be used for statistical purposes. All statistical information produced is completely anonymised. The information provided by you is processed by the College in strict accordance with Data Protection legislation, including the Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulation.

Any paper written case-notes, forms and letters are stored in locked cabinets. Electronic records, which may include case-notes, forms and letters are stored securely within the College network and are password protected. All records (paper and electronic) are only accessible to the staff of the service. They are kept for 6 years after your last attendance, and then destroyed confidentially.

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Under data protection legislation you have the right to see your record or request a copy of it (either in electronic or paper form). This is known as a 'Subject Access Request' (SAR). For more information see https://www.south-lanarkshire-college.ac.uk/about-us/procurement-policies/how-to-request-information/

Feedback and Evaluation

To ensure the service continually meets your needs and for the purpose of developing best practice, we will invite you to complete an evaluation form. Your support in this process is appreciated and all reporting feedback will be completely anonymised.

Complaints

If you have been dissatisfied with the service you should contact the Head of Student Services, who will look at options for resolution and assist with further steps. If you would like to make a formal complaint, you may do so through the College's Complaints Procedure. Further information on how to make a complaint is available at https://www.south-lanarkshire-college.ac.uk/life-at-slc/student-charter-and-policies/complaints-procedure/