

## WORKING WITHIN AND ACROSS OTHER AGENCIES

### Overview

Counsellors may wish to consider three principles when thinking about inter-agency working. Fundamentally, a decision to work across agencies should be founded on the basis that the collaboration and ensuing work will benefit the welfare of the young person. Secondly, that counsellors, when working across agencies, will be clear about the service they can offer and where their responsibilities lie - in relation to the young client, and to the other agencies themselves. And thirdly, to work effectively across agencies, counsellors will need to be knowledgeable about the range of other services available to support children and their families.<sup>i</sup>

This Good Practice Guidance relates to these principles, and the reader may find further helpful information in the suggested further reading section.

### Involvement of other services

#### a) When counselling is not appropriate<sup>ii iii</sup>

There are times when counselling may not be appropriate for a child or young person, but the individual client could benefit from alternative support or a different intervention. Instances of such occasions are:

- A counsellor may undertake an initial assessment of a client and consider that counselling is not suitable at this stage. For example, the client has been 'sent' for counselling and does not want to attend
- A counsellor recognises that an individual case is complex and outside of their competence, and realises, often in supervision, that their continuing involvement with the client is no longer appropriate
- A client may not be responding to a counselling intervention, showing no sign of improvement
- The case is related to issues about the client's adoption, and the counsellor is not registered for this work.

#### b) When other interventions supplement counselling

Other instances may arise when an alternative intervention may be helpful to complement ongoing counselling. It is not uncommon during counselling for client issues to arise that weren't fully present during an initial assessment and, as a consequence, the counsellor and young person may consider that a further, supplementary intervention could benefit the client. An example would be when a counsellor learns that their client with low mood is engaging in risky behaviours with drugs and/or alcohol. The counsellor may well continue to work with the client's underlying issues of self worth and self esteem, whilst a simultaneous referral to a drug and alcohol worker would be useful in educating the client to the risks of their substance misuse.

In circumstances described in a) and b), the client may benefit from the counsellor seeking a request for another service to be involved - more commonly called a referral.

### **Involvement of children, young people and families**

At times when a counsellor believes involving another service would be beneficial, the counsellor has a responsibility, wherever possible, to discuss onward referral with the young person<sup>iv</sup>(and if appropriate their families), to gain their informed consent for the referral. Permission from those with capacity to consent should be sought for information to be shared between counsellor and the other agency. Decisions regarding onward referral, including client's consent and any following actions should be recorded in the counsellor's notes. For more information on consent, please see GPG 3 'Capacity, Consent and Confidentiality'.

### **Role boundaries**

When counsellors work across agencies, it is important they are clear about their specific areas of responsibility in relation to the client(s). These are likely to include their responsibilities regarding assessment, planning of work, management of waiting lists, the counselling intervention itself, and ongoing monitoring and review of clients. Being able to communicate these areas clearly to clients, their families and other agencies, is important as it establishes boundaries that all can understand and abide by.

This transparency makes for more effective inter-agency working, as all parties know what to expect from the counsellor - what is, and what is not, part of their role. For example, it would be essential for a school counsellor to communicate their position and work patterns during school holidays. Some school counsellors will have term-time only contracts and therefore not be working; others may be in school for some time during the holidays writing reports and planning, and may only be available for clinical work in emergencies; whereas others will continue to have planned sessions with clients. It is important that staff from other agencies know and understand what the counselling service can offer during these periods, and the extent and limits of its responsibilities.

Being able to clearly communicate the scope and protocols of the counselling service enables professionals working in other settings to seek appropriate referrals to the counselling service.

Many counsellors develop information leaflets for potential referrers that include these dimensions of their work.

### **Knowledge of other agencies**

For effective liaison between agencies, the counsellor needs to be knowledgeable about what services are available in their locality. These may be statutory services, like specialist CAMHS; Third Sector services, often charities, operating in the community; or independent services in the private sector, for example a specialist play therapist working in private practice.

In whichever sector the service operates, ideally counsellors should be aware of:

- where, geographically, the agency is located, and if they will use other sites e.g.GP surgery
- the referral protocols operated to access to the service
- policies and procedures relating to confidentiality and information sharing
- the interventions offered
- contact details of key staff
- roles and responsibilities of staff that they or families may have contact with
- the length of waiting times
- any financial payment or donation that may be expected (for non-statutory services).

Counsellors are behaving ethically and professionally when they have relevant and accurate knowledge about other agencies, and can communicate this information to their clients when collaboratively considering onward referral.

Building relationships with key stakeholders in advance of any collaborative working or onward referral can be highly beneficial for all concerned.<sup>v</sup>

### **Summary**

Collaborating with, and referring into, other agencies is something that counsellors working with children and young people will need to do, to some extent or another. Being prepared for this inter-agency collaboration will ensure more effective communication between all parties. Being clear about the extent and limits of the counsellor's service, and knowledgeable about aspects of other agencies work, should contribute to efficient and effective working relationships and referral pathways.

**Sources and suggested further reading**

---

<sup>i</sup> Hill, A., Roth, A. and Cooper, M. (2014) *The Competences Required to Deliver Effective Humanistic Counselling for Young People – Counsellors’ Guide*. Lutterworth

<sup>ii</sup> DfE (Department for Education) (2016) *Counselling in schools: a blueprint for the future*. London (31)

<sup>iii</sup> DoE (Department of Education) (2012) *Independent Counselling Service for Schools: Operating Handbook* (20)

<sup>iv</sup> United Nations Convention on Rights of the Child Article 12

<sup>v</sup> Cromarty, K. and Richards, K. (2009) ‘How do school counsellors work with other professionals?’, *Counselling and Psychotherapy Research*, 9 (3):182-186.

Kirkbride, R. (2016) *Counselling Children and Young People in Private Practice*. Karnac Chapter Seven

**Online Resources**MindEd Sessions

CMD	412-011	Counselling and Specialist CAMHS
Core	410-002	People Working in Child Mental Health
CYP IAPT	413-024	Working Across Organisations

Spong, S., Waters, R., Dowd, C. and Jackson, C. (2013) *The relationship between specialist child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) and school- and community-based counselling for children and young people*. Lutterworth. BACP/Counselling MindEd