



Counselling Information for Primary School Parents/Guardians/Carers

Dear Parent/Guardian/Carer,

As you are aware your child has been referred to the school counselling service. To assist you we have provided some information about *informed consent* in relation to school counselling services. *Informed consent* means that you are given sufficient information so that you understand and can make appropriate decisions (such as giving consent) about the counselling service for your child.

Informed consent is not just a form or a signature. It involves a private conversation between you and the Counsellor and covers the following:

1. Information

You should be provided with enough information to understand what your consent means. It is important that you clearly understand all the parts of your consent, which include:

- a. Counsellor's role and services they provide
- b. Confidentiality and its limits
- c. Nature of intervention (consequences and implications of any service provided)
- d. The privacy of information collected during the provision of the counselling service including with respect to:
 - a. Information sharing (gathering information from third parties or sharing information with others)
 - b. Record management (why and what information is recorded, record storage, ownership and access)
- e. Length of service and consent (how long is your consent valid, duration and frequency of sessions, how you can withdraw your consent and the counselling closure process).

It is important that you understand each of the above parts and that you should be given enough time to review your consent and ask questions about the referral before signing the consent form or giving verbal consent.

2. Willingness to give consent

You don't have to provide consent. The Counsellor should discuss what may happen if you do not give consent so that you can understand how your child could be affected if counselling services are not provided. You also have the right to withdraw your consent at any time.

3. Giving consent

If you sign and date the consent form you give your permission for the Counsellor to work with you and your child. Consent can also be obtained verbally (the Counsellor will document this).

School counselling role?

At different times families and children may benefit from our counselling service. School Counsellors use their expertise to provide short term counselling to support students achieve academic success, social and emotional wellbeing and psychological health. Counselling occurs when a student or parent/guardian/carer and Counsellor set aside time to explore concerns.

A school Counsellor can assist you and/or your child by providing support and strategies to help at school and/or home. This might include support for: parent/child relationships, stress, grief and loss, or significant changes at home. At school, your child may require support with: goal setting, decision-making, learning difficulties, mental health issues, anger management, self-esteem, resilience and negotiating friendships.

Sometimes short term counselling support is not the ideal option; in this case, the school counsellor will provide you with a more appropriate referral option.

Working in partnership

Parents are seen as integral to the school counselling process. Research indicates that whilst children benefit from counselling, the gains are even greater when parents are involved. This is why, from the beginning, the counsellor will speak with you about your concerns and observations of your child. They will also outline the nature of intervention and consequences of any service provided. If you wish to decline the service, alternative options will be discussed with you.

When consent is given the Counsellor will arrange sessions with your child throughout the term to provide support and strategies. The frequency of sessions could vary from weekly, fortnightly or as needed. The information discussed in these sessions is confidential (see limits to confidentiality on page 2), but key themes and take-home messages are communicated to you, as you are their main support outside of school.

Throughout this process, parents/guardians/carers are encouraged to collaborate with the Counsellor to discuss the progress of their child.

If you as a parent/guardian feel you would benefit from some support, the school counsellor can help connect you with appropriate services.

Confidentiality and its limits

Confidentiality is a very important part of counselling. It means that information you or your child provide to the Counsellor will generally not be disclosed without your consent unless an exception applies or unless in accordance with the School's Privacy Policy.

The exceptions that may apply

In accordance with professional responsibilities, the Counsellor may need to disclose details to other people within the School or external to the School in the following circumstances:

- The Counsellor has a reasonable belief that there is a risk to your child's health, safety or wellbeing or that of another person;
- There is a legal requirement to do so including as the result of a court subpoena or mandatory reporting provisions; and,
- It is necessary for the Counsellor to obtain legal advice.

The School's privacy policy

Counselling is a service provided by Catholic Education Diocese of Rockhampton. All Australian health services are required to comply with legislation and regulations which protect the use and disclosure of personal information. The Counsellor and School complies with Australian privacy legislation and standards safe-guarding your information.

Catholic Education's full privacy policy can be accessed online at: <http://www.rok.catholic.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/Privacy-2018-05-1.pdf>.

The School makes every effort to adhere to the Guidelines for schools developed by the Office of the Australian Information Commissioner. Information provided to the School will comply with Information Privacy Principles, and particularly principles 1, 2, 3, 10 and 11.

No person will have access to your information except to the extent required to deliver the counselling service. Examples of this may mean:

1. As your child will have appointments during the school day, the school's duty of care obligations mean that your child's teacher and/or principal might be aware that the counselling is occurring. However, the information you/your child provide during the counselling process will remain confidential.
2. In some instances, sharing of basic necessary information with school staff (eg. Learning Support, Teacher, Head of House etc) may be needed to help with a more coordinated approach in working towards better learning outcomes for your child. The information is for the purpose of gaining extra support and providing the most appropriate program for your child. If you wish to provide information that you do not want shared with relevant school staff, you must inform the Counsellor in writing.
3. A third party may be present during sessions if required (eg. counselling supervisor or other school counsellor).
4. Other school counsellors or the Counselling services Coordinator/Delegate may need to access your information, in order to: continue service if school counsellor is absent, support in critical incident situations when additional personnel are assisting, undertake supervision and quality assurance activities or to fulfil requirements of the law.
5. To administer our service, including the arrangement or changes of appointments, the support of counsellors, administration of counselling records database, the handling of feedback, data analysis, research, statistical and survey purposes.
6. To fulfil our administrative, legal and contractual obligations as an employer.

Record Management

When Counsellors see a new student, a digital file is opened that contains relevant information. As services are provided, case notes, reports, programs and plans will be added to the file. The purpose of collecting this information is to inform and record the Counsellor's work. The Counsellor is able to provide information regarding record access. Records regarding students will be stored securely until the student attains the age of 25 years. Records will then be destroyed or permanently de-identified.

If your child transfers to another Catholic school/college in the Rockhampton Diocese, the Counsellor in the new school/college can access this file. Please advise in writing if you do not wish for this to occur. If you transfer to a non-Rockhampton Diocese Catholic school, (e.g. private school, Education Queensland school or interstate) information will only be exchanged with your consent, except as otherwise required by law. All information collected and stored by the school Counsellor is the property of Catholic Education, Diocese of Rockhampton.

Length of Consent and Closure

When you give consent, you are agreeing for your child to engage in counselling services at your current school. The Counsellor will speak with you to make sure you continue to provide your permission at the beginning of each school year. If you think you may want to withdraw your consent for counselling services, it is useful to first have a discussion with the Counsellor.

When counselling services are no longer required, a discussion will be held between you, your child and the Counsellor. Counselling will stop and the referral will be closed. If at some time in the future, counselling services are required, you will need to make a new request for service and sign another consent form.

If you have any questions about the school counselling service, please do not hesitate to contact me through the school.

Yours faithfully,

Anita Katajamaki

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