

Appendix 3

Information for Parents/legal Guardians – Counselling in Primary Schools Pilot (CPS-P)



What is the Counselling in Primary Schools Programme?

- > The Department of Education (DE) believes that looking after the wellbeing of our children is really important in helping them to be happy in their lives and to reach their full potential.
- > This school year the Department is piloting a counselling service in our school. The counselling will be provided by qualified and experienced counsellors. This service does not replace the services provided by the HSE Primary Care Psychology or the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) and if your child is attending one of these services they should continue to do so. If they are on a waiting list for one of these services they should remain on the list.

What is school counselling and why are children referred?

- > During their school life, children may need support beyond the normal support given by teachers and parents/guardians. If the school has a concern about your child they will have discussed this with you before putting any supports in place. They will open a Student Support File and agree a support plan with you.
- > There may be times when children are affected by things that happen in their lives like someone in the family getting sick or someone dying or parents breaking up. They may feel a bit overwhelmed by their feelings and find it hard to focus and learn in school.
- > This pilot will provide an opportunity for children to meet with a qualified counsellor and work through any issues they have.

- > The counselling will be in the school during the school day. The counselling is short term and is up to 6 sessions for a child with the counsellor.
- > The counselling will help children to:
 - cope better with their feelings
 - learn about and understand their feelings
 - develop coping skills
 - improve their relationships with others

What can parents do to help?

- > The counsellor will meet with the parents/legal guardians and a member of the school staff like the child's class teacher or Special Education Teacher before they meet the child in order to understand the parents/guardians/school's concerns. They will also meet with parents/legal guardians and a member of the school staff when the block of counselling finishes to discuss what may make a difference to the child in school and at home. They may even invite you to some sessions if appropriate.

Who are the counsellors?

- > The counsellors are qualified and experienced in working with children and young people. They are accredited members of a professional body and are required to practice within the standards set by their professional body. They have also been Garda vetted.

How is a child referred to the counselling service?

- > We are asking schools to prioritise children who continue to have needs despite parents/legal guardians and the school having worked together and put supports in place for a period of time to address these needs. Before referring a child for counselling, the school will also discuss the child's needs with a psychologist from the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) to establish if they feel that a referral to counselling would be beneficial to the child. NEPS role in this instance is for the purpose of supporting and advising schools and parental/legal guardian consent is not required for this. The child will only be referred for counselling with the consent of parents/legal guardians.

Where and when does it take place?

- > The counselling sessions will take place in the school in a private, warm and welcoming room during the school day. Sessions can last up to fifty minutes and the times and days when the sessions take place may change from week to week.

What happens to information about the children?

- > The counsellor will keep a confidential record of their work with the child including a copy of the completed referral and consent form seen and signed by the parents/legal guardians and notes on the sessions with the child. All personal information will be held securely by the counsellor off the school premises and managed in line with GDPR requirements and the guidelines of their accrediting body.
- > The counsellor will treat all information about the child as confidential and will not share this information with another person or agency without parent/legal guardian written consent, unless the welfare and safety of the child and/or another person is considered to be at risk.
- > The principal/teacher in the school will keep a copy of the Referral and Consent form and a note of the dates and times of the sessions and will store them securely in the school in accordance with the school's GDPR policy.

What if a child does not want to engage with/continue with the counselling sessions?

- > Each child can decide not to engage or to withdraw from the counselling sessions at any stage. This will not have any negative consequences for parents/legal guardians or the child.

Counselling scheme evaluation

- > As this is a pilot, the Department of Education will be commissioning an external evaluator to evaluate the pilot and will be inviting and seeking feedback from parents/legal guardians and the children and from the schools and the NEPS psychologists.

What do I do if I am not happy with the counselling service?

- > The Department of Education is committed to children having access to a quality counselling service. Counsellors in the pilot are required to practice within the ethical framework for good practice and standards set by their professional body. If a parent/legal guardian has concerns specifically about the counselling service, they should discuss these with the counsellor working with their child. Where the informal resolution proves unsuccessful it is hoped that the formal resolution process will resolve the matter satisfactorily via the *Counselling in Primary Schools Pilot 2023-25 Complaints Procedure for Schools and Parents/Guardians*.