



COUNSELLING POLICY

POLICY FOR	COUNSELLING POLICY
PERSON RESPONSIBLE	Student Counsellors
REVIEW DATE	April 2026
REVIEWED BY	Head of Inclusion
APPROVED DATE	May 2026
APPROVED BY	ELT
DATE OF NEXT REVIEW	May 2027
RELATED POLICIES	Safeguarding / child protection policy, Health and Safety Policy, Inclusion Policy, Mental health and Wellbeing Policy, Anti-bullying policy, Reward and sanction Policy, Online safety Policy

Executive Principal / CEO and Brand

Ambassador for GEMS Westminster Schools



1. Policy Statement

At Westminster School Dubai, we recognise the critical importance of fostering the holistic well-being of all students. In alignment with best practices and educational standards, our counselling service is designed to support students in their behavioural, social and emotional growth, ensuring they are equipped to thrive in a complex and ever-changing world. This policy serves as a guiding framework for the school's comprehensive counselling programme, which is tailored to address the diverse needs of students across all age groups.

2. Vision and Mission

The Counselling Policy is guided by a vision and mission that are fully aligned with the school's overarching vision and mission.

Vision: Empowering learners, creating the future

Mission: To inspire a diverse and multicultural community of learners to achieve academic excellence and develop the skills and attributes to become successful global leaders. To empower each other to lead happy and fulfilling lives in a culture of tolerance, innovation and creativity. To create a safe, respectful and equitable learning environment where everyone is free to express their opinion and to have that opinion fully respected.

3. Aims and Objectives

The Counselling Department aims to provide a supportive and nurturing environment for students to address challenges, manage emotions, and foster overall well-being. The following goals outline the key priorities for the school counselling policy:

- Early identification of student wellbeing needs
- Structured tiered intervention delivery
- Safeguarding-first decision making
- Ethical and confidential counselling practice
- Clear referral and triage systems
- Defined counsellor roles and limits of practice
- Strong parent partnership

4. Scope

This policy applies to all students, counsellors, career counsellors, pastoral and inclusion staff, safeguarding personnel, and teaching staff making referrals.

Counselling covers:

- Emotional wellbeing
- Social difficulties
- Academic stress
- Crisis response
- Bereavement and trauma support
- Adjustment and transition support
- Addictions

5. Counsellor Role and Professional Boundaries

The primary role of the School Counsellor is to promote and protect the emotional, social, and psychological well-being of all students. The Counsellor is a key member of the school community, providing supportive, confidential, and inclusive space for students, staff, and parents to explore and manage challenges that may impact personal development.

School counsellors provide short-term, school-based, non-clinical counselling support.

Counsellors:

- Deliver preventative and responsive interventions
- Provide short-term counselling blocks
- Deliver group interventions
- Support crisis response
- Contribute to safeguarding processes
- Coordinate external referrals when required

Counsellors do not:

- Provide long-term psychotherapy
- Provide medical or psychiatric treatment
- Diagnose mental disorders
- Replace clinical services

- Provide behaviour therapy

Students requiring specialist therapy are referred externally under Tier 4 procedures.

6. Referral process and collaboration

At TWS we recognise the importance of a clear, structured, and collaborative approach to student well-being. Our counselling referral system ensures that all stakeholders including teachers, Heads of House, parents, and students are engaged appropriately and that referrals are handled with confidentiality, sensitivity, and professionalism. Below are the four primary pathways for counselling referrals:

1. Teacher Referral

- A teacher identifies emotional, behavioural, or social concerns in a student through observation.
- The teacher communicates their concern to the Head of House/Head of Pastoral.
- The Head of House/Head of Pastoral discusses the referral and the next step with the Counsellor.
- Upon obtaining written parental consent, the student is referred to the School Counsellor for support.

2. Student (Self) Referral

- A student may independently seek support by approaching the School Counsellor directly.
- Following the initial session, the Counsellor informs the Head of House and the Form Tutor to ensure pastoral alignment.
- The Counsellor discusses the referral and the next step with the Head of House/Head of Pastoral to obtain the written consent for ongoing support.
- No long-term counselling sessions are conducted without prior parental awareness and approval.

3. Parent/Guardian Referral

- A parent or guardian may raise concerns about their child's emotional, behavioural, or social well-being.
- Concerns can be shared with the Form Tutor, Head of House, or directly with the School Counsellor.
- Once the parental consent form is completed, the student is scheduled to meet with the School Counsellor.

4. Pastoral Referral

- Based on pastoral care team observations or incidents reported within the school, a referral may be initiated.
- This pathway is generally used when the concerns are significant or require urgent emotional support.
- As with all referrals, parental consent is required before any counselling sessions commence.

Emergency referrals are prioritised where risk indicators are present. Access is equitable and non-discriminatory.

7. Triage Process



Initial triage is conducted within a week of referral receipt depending on the severity of the situation. Safeguarding/ Crisis referrals are prioritised immediately.

External Referral

- If, after initial counselling, it is assessed that the student requires specialised or long-term intervention beyond the scope of school-based support, the School Counsellor will recommend an external referral.
- This will always be discussed with the parents/guardians, and referrals will be made only with their informed consent.
- The school may collaborate with external professionals to ensure a seamless support plan for the students' ongoing well-being.
- Students experiencing or identified with suicidal thoughts, self-harm, or severe mental health issues will be referred to external counseling services for specialised support and they are allowed back into the school only on receiving the 'Fit to return to school' certificate from their treating doctor/psychologist.

Safeguarding Integration

- Immediate reporting of concerns to DSL
- Participation in safeguarding meetings
- Following child protection procedures
- Prioritising safety over confidentiality
- Participation in risk planning

Counselling Risk Assessment & Crisis Protocol

Structured risk screening includes assessment of self-harm risk, suicidal ideation, abuse indicators, severe distress, and trauma exposure.

If risk is identified:

- Immediate safety assessment conducted
- Student not left unsupported
- DSL notified same day
- Parent contacted unless contraindicated
- Safety plan created
- External referral considered

8. Tiered Support

Tier 1 -Universal support (whole school) is delivered collaboratively to ensure a whole-school approach to wellbeing.

- Pastoral Team – Oversees student wellbeing, monitors concerns, and supports early intervention strategies.
- Wellbeing Champion – Leads mental health awareness initiatives and promotes a culture of wellbeing across the school.
- School Counsellor – Provides guidance, resources, consultation, and preventive workshops.
- Teaching Staff – Implement classroom strategies and wellbeing-focused practices.

Tier 2 – Targeted Support (Early Intervention)

- Pastoral Team – Provide pastoral oversight, collaborate with teaching staff, and support ongoing monitoring and wellbeing of students requiring additional assistance.
- Teaching Staff – Implements classroom strategies and provides feedback on student progress.
- Student Mentors and wellbeing ambassadors – Offers peer support and early intervention where appropriate.
- School Counsellor – In collaboration with the Pastoral Team, leads scheduled or on-request consultations with teachers and parents.

Tier 3 – Intensive Support (Individual)

- School Counsellor – Provides 1:1 counselling sessions (typically 6–8 sessions) and conducts ongoing review in collaboration with teachers and parents.
- Teachers – Collaborate with the School Counsellor to support student progress and provide feedback.
- Parents – Participate in consultations to support the student’s wellbeing and progress.

Tier 4 – External Support (Specialist referral)

- School Counsellor – Refers students to external professionals or agencies for high-risk or long-term concerns and liaises with external providers to ensure coordinated support (with parental consent).
- Parents – Provide consent and collaborate with the school and external providers to support the student's care and progress.

Case Closure and Follow-Up

Once the designated support has been provided and the student has completed the agreed intervention plan, the case is formally closed by the School Counsellor. Documentation of the intervention, outcomes, and any recommendations is maintained in line with confidentiality and school record-keeping policies.

If the same student experiences new or recurring concerns, a new referral must be submitted. Previous referrals and case notes are considered historical information but are not treated as an active referral, ensuring that each instance of support is assessed and triaged independently.

9. Confidentiality and Consent

Every student is entitled to a private life and to have their autonomy respected, as established under Article 8 of the Human Rights Act 1998. In addition, Article 379 of the UAE Penal Code states that anyone entrusted with a secret due to their profession or position who discloses it unlawfully commits an offense.

While confidentiality is a core principle in counselling, there are circumstances where it may be limited, particularly when a student's safety is at risk. In such cases, counsellors are required to follow child protection procedures, prioritising the wellbeing and safety of the student, in accordance with UAE Federal Law No. 3 of 2016 (Child Rights Law / Wadeema's Law) and the school's Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy.

Confidentiality is generally maintained in counselling sessions. However, information may be shared with parents or staff only with the student's awareness and consent, except

where legal, ethical, or safeguarding obligations require disclosure. Mandatory disclosure applies when there is a risk of:

- Self-harm or suicidal ideation
- Harm to others
- Abuse, neglect, or exploitation
- Any situation requiring reporting under UAE child protection legislation

At the start of counselling, students are informed, in age-appropriate language, about the scope and limits of confidentiality, including the circumstances under which information may be shared. This approach aligns with KHDA safeguarding requirements and ensures transparency while prioritising student wellbeing.

Consent for Counselling

- FS–Year 6 (KG–Grade 5) students: Parental consent is required following the initial counselling session for ongoing support.
- Year 7–13 (Grade 6–12) students: Informed consent is obtained directly from the student, in line with KHDA’s emphasis on student voice and agency, with parental involvement as appropriate and proportionate to the level of concern.
- Student assent: Across all phases, student assent is secured prior to any intervention to ensure they understand and agree to participate.

Safeguarding Exceptions:

In cases of immediate or significant risk, counselling intervention may proceed without prior parental consent, in accordance with UAE child protection law and safeguarding protocols. Decisions regarding parent notification in high-risk cases are determined by the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), prioritising student safety while maintaining compliance with regulations and ensuring appropriate parental engagement.

11. Collaboration with Inclusion Team

The Counselling team collaborates closely with the Inclusion department to support Students of Determination (SOD) through multidisciplinary meetings to ensure a holistic approach.

For students with a formal diagnosis of psycho emotional disorders as per KHDA categorisation, a structured counselling intervention plan is developed and targeted interventions are provided.

For Students of Determination classified as Wave 3, regular wellbeing check-ins are provided to monitor social-emotional progress and offer ongoing support.

12. Partners in the School Counselling Programme

The school counselling programme relies on strong partnerships among administrators, teachers, parents/guardians, and community members to support student wellbeing and development.

Administrators - including the Executive Leadership team, Senior Leadership team, and non-teaching staff—support the programme by implementing and upholding policies and procedures, and by working with school counsellors to build connections with community resources that enhance the counselling process.

Teachers -are key contributors, providing critical information and feedback based on daily interactions with students, collaborating with counsellors to assess and monitor student progress, and facilitating access to group counselling sessions, workshops, and self-referrals.

Parents and guardians - work in partnership with school counsellors to support their child's academic, developmental, emotional, and social growth. Counsellors provide parents with guidance, intervention strategies, and tools to reinforce counselling objectives at home, ensuring interventions are more effective. Parental consent is sought for students, and parents are kept informed of referrals and proposed interventions.

Community partners - including psychologists, psychiatrists, medical professionals, and university/educational specialists -contribute through workshops, assessments, and consultations that further students' development.

13. Record Management

All counselling records, including process notes, are confidential, maintained digitally, and securely stored. These records do not form part of the student's official school record and are not accessible to any other staff members. Students generally have the right to access their own counselling material; however, parents or guardians do not have automatic access. In accordance with Section 4(3)(6)(1) of the Data Protection Act 1998, any disclosure or processing of such material is considered "unwarranted in any particular case by reason of prejudice to the rights and freedoms or legitimate interests of the child concerned."

Review & Accountability

- This policy is reviewed annually.
- School leadership ensures consistent implementation and measurable impact.