

COUNSELLING SERVICE

Code of practice on confidentiality and data protection

This leaflet outlines our responsibilities and practices in respect of information on clients and explains our policies on confidentiality and data protection.

Confidentiality

Staff of the Counselling Service will not pass on personal information about a client (including information on attendance) to anyone outside the service subject to the following exceptions:

- Where a member of the Counselling Service has the express consent of the client to disclose the information or data.
- Where a member of the Counselling Service would be liable to civil or criminal procedure if the information was not disclosed.
- Where a member of the Counselling Service believes the client is in serious danger.

In any of these circumstances the counsellor or advisor will normally encourage the client him/herself to pass on information to the relevant person/agency. If there is no indication that this has happened, and if the crisis or danger is sufficiently acute, the counsellor or adviser may pass on the information directly.

Consent to disclose information will be sought from the client, if at all possible.

Supervision

In line with their professional requirements, the counsellor may discuss their work with a supervisor external to the service. In this process the identity of the client is not revealed. The purpose of supervision is to help the counsellor reflect on their work.

Liaison and correspondence

With the express permission of the client, it may be appropriate for the counsellor to liaise with or write to a third party, for example a member of College administration, professor or General Practitioner. In the case of phone calls, the purpose will be discussed with the client prior to the call.

Record keeping and data protection

It is essential for counsellors to keep notes. Counselling notes record attendance and any issues of concern needing follow up or further referral.

Access to notes

Under the General Data Protection Regulations, clients have a right of access to all notes kept on them. If these notes contain references to other individuals these may not be available to the client, as protection is also granted to third parties. It will be important not just to show the notes to the client, but for the counsellor to talk to them about what their file contains and why. Some notes may be in shorthand and need explaining.

If a client wishes to see their file they should ask their counsellor giving two weeks' notice.

Security

All notes and records are kept securely locked within the Service.

In line with legal requirements, counselling notes are kept for a period of seven years. After this time they are securely destroyed.

Codes of ethics

The counsellors adhere to the Codes of Ethics and Professional Practice as required by their professional accrediting bodies, the United Kingdom Council for Psychotherapy and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy. Copies of these are available from the Service.

All clients using the Counselling Service will be asked to sign their form to say that they have read and understood the Code of Practice on Confidentiality and Data Protection.