



**ST. MARY'S** *Catholic High School, Dubai*

# **COUNSELLING POLICY**

**2025-2026**



# **ST. MARY'S** *Catholic High School, Dubai*

## **COUNSELLING POLICY**

### **Student Support Services Department**

The Student Support Services Department at St. Mary's Catholic High School, Dubai offers counselling services with a caring, confidential, respectful and supportive environment for students who may require professional assistance or who experience difficulties in any aspect of their life.

The counsellor, as part of a team of specialist staff, focuses on supporting students' personal and social, as well as their educational and vocational development. The counselling service aims to meet the guidance and counselling needs of students, recognising the student as the central figure in the learning process, and operates in alignment with the school's overall mission and values.

### **MISSION STATEMENT**

We serve with compassion to develop a deep sense of integrity, mutual respect and tolerance within the Marian family so that the uniqueness of each person is celebrated, allowing them to holistically develop as successful learners and responsible citizens.

The End Crowns The Work.

### **VISION:**

The School Counsellor works as part of a multidisciplinary team of specialist staff and supports students' personal and social development, as well as their educational and vocational guidance. The aim of the counselling service is to respond to the guidance and counselling needs of students, recognising each student as central to the learning process and supporting their overall wellbeing in alignment with the school's mission and values.



## **Definition:**

Counselling is a supportive and interactive process between the counsellor and the student, delivered either individually or in small groups. It adopts a holistic approach to addressing personal, social, educational, and vocational concerns that may impact a student's wellbeing, behaviour, or engagement with learning.

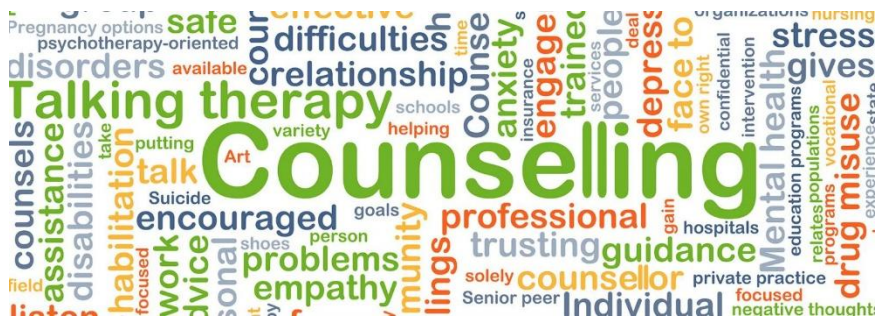
The availability of a school-based counselling service supports students both within and beyond the classroom context and complements the school's pastoral and disciplinary structures. Counselling aims to promote emotional wellbeing, positive relationships, resilience, and effective coping strategies.

The service may support students experiencing a range of difficulties, including but not limited to bullying, social exclusion, family difficulties, academic underachievement, peer pressure, emotional distress, and issues related to behaviour or relationships. Where concerns extend beyond the scope of school-based counselling, appropriate safeguarding procedures are followed, and external support may be recommended in consultation with parents.

## **Goals:**

The counselling departments aims to:

- Work collaboratively with students, parents/carers, staff, and external agencies to support the holistic wellbeing of students;
- Ensure students are provided with appropriate guidance, support, and information to help them achieve their potential;
- Equip teachers with strategies to manage behavioural and emotional concerns within the classroom;
- Support parents in creating a nurturing and supportive home environment;
- Ensure students, parents/carers, and staff are aware of the counselling services available;
- Promote a positive school experience wherever possible



## Counselling provision includes:

- Emotional support (individual and group);
- Career guidance
- Training and workshops for students, parents, and staff;
- Screening and support pathways leading to external assessment where appropriate.

## Code of Practice

The Counselling department operates professionally and ethically, maintaining confidentiality in counselling interactions. School counsellors maintain strict confidentiality except in circumstances where a student's safety or well-being may be at risk, or where disclosure is required in line with safeguarding and child protection procedures.

The department operates in accordance with the school's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy, which ensures students feel safe, supported, and secure.

The Child Protection framework is underpinned by four key principles:

**Prevention** – Promoting a positive school culture and proactive pastoral support;

**Protection** – Following clear safeguarding procedures and responding promptly to concerns;

**Support** – Providing appropriate support to students and staff;

**Collaboration** – Working in partnership with students, parents, staff, and external agencies.

Safeguarding is the responsibility of all staff members. This policy applies to all staff and should be read in conjunction with the Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy.



## Areas of Need

Counselling support is provided for students experiencing a range of needs, in line with KHDA School Inspection Framework guidance, including:

| TYPE OF NEED                                                                                   | DESCRIPTION<br>As per KHDA School Inspection Framework V16, 2015-16                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Behavioural, Social, Emotional                                                                 | <p><b>Behaviour that presents a barrier to learning</b></p> <p>Emotional problems such as depression, eating disorders, attention deficit disorder or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADD/ADHD), Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), Conduct Disorder (CD), childhood psychoses and syndromes such as Tourette's.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| Sensory                                                                                        | <p><b>Visual impairment</b></p> <p>Visual impairment is when a person has sight loss that cannot be fully corrected using glasses or contact lenses</p> <p><b>Hearing impairment</b></p> <p>Hearing impairment, deafness, or hearing loss refers to the inability to hear things, either totally or partially.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |
| Physical Disability                                                                            | <p>Disabilities arising from conditions such as congenital deformities, spina bifida and/or hydrocephalus, muscular dystrophy, cerebral palsy, brittle bones, haemophilia, cystic fibrosis or severe accidental injury. It is important to state that there is no necessary direct correlation between the degree of physical disability and the inability to cope with the school curriculum, apart from the elements involving physical activity. Students with severe physical disability may have minimal special educational needs, while those with minimal physical disability may have serious learning needs.</p> |
| Medical Conditions or Health Related Disability                                                | <p>Medical conditions that may lead to an associated "special need". These conditions may be temporary but are more likely to be ongoing and include such illness as asthma, diabetes and allergies.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| Speech and Language Disorders (This does not include students with additional language needs.) | <p>Expressive language disorder – problems using oral language or other expressive language. Students' understanding of language is likely to exceed their ability to communicate orally.</p> <p>Receptive language disorder – problems understanding oral language or in listening.</p> <p>Global language disorder – difficulties with both receptive and expressive language. Global language disorders affect both the understanding and use of language.</p>                                                                                                                                                          |
| Communication and Interaction                                                                  | <p>Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASDs) are neurological disorders that are characterised by difficulties with social communication, social interaction, social imagination and flexible thinking.</p> <p>Asperger's Syndrome is thought to fall within the spectrum of autism, but with enough distinct features to warrant its own label. It is characterised by subtle impairments in three areas of development. There is no clinically significant delay in cognitive development or in language acquisition. However, students with Asperger's Syndrome often have communication difficulties.</p>                       |

## **Guidelines for the Department**

Keeping the identified areas of need in mind, the Counselling Department is committed to the following:

- Adhering to all applicable UAE laws and regulations relating to the wellbeing, protection, and safeguarding of children. This includes Wadeema's Law (Federal Law No. 3 of 2016), which affirms every child's right to appropriate living standards, access to education and healthcare, and equal opportunities without discrimination.
- Recognising and responding to concerns related to online safety and cyberbullying. The school acknowledges that acts such as defamation, harassment, or misuse of digital platforms may constitute criminal offences under UAE law, including provisions within the Penal Code (Federal Law No. 3 of 1987) and the Cyber Crimes Law (Federal Decree Law No. 5 of 2012).
- The school also recognises its duty to safeguard students in relation to substance misuse. The possession, use, or promotion of vaping products, tobacco, alcohol, or illegal substances by underage students is prohibited under UAE law, including Federal Law No. 15 of 2009 on Tobacco Control, Federal Law No. 14 of 1995 on the Control of Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances (as amended), and relevant UAE public health and child protection legislation.

Any concerns relating to substance use, whether on school premises, during school-related activities, or online, are addressed in accordance with the school's safeguarding, behaviour, wellbeing, and digital safety policies, and in line with KHDA expectations. (Refer to Schools Anti-Smoking, Anti- Vaping and Drug Abuse Policy)

- Adopting an open, supportive, and accepting approach to students as part of the school's pastoral responsibility. Staff strive to ensure that students and parents feel confident in raising concerns and view the school as a safe and supportive environment.
- Taking students' worries and fears seriously, encouraging them to seek help from trusted adults, and ensuring concerns are responded to sensitively and appropriately.
- Establishing and maintaining a school ethos where students feel secure, are encouraged to communicate openly, and know they will be listened to.
- Ensuring students are aware of the adults within the school whom they can approach if they feel worried or are experiencing difficulties.
- Providing opportunities for students to develop resilience, emotional literacy, and the skills needed to stay safe and promote personal wellbeing.

- Making every effort to establish effective working relationships with parents, teachers, and relevant staff in order to support students consistently.
- Ensuring all staff are aware of safeguarding procedures, referral pathways, and how and when to act on concerns relating to student wellbeing.
- Ensuring there is a clearly defined and proportionate response when the need for counselling is identified. This response takes into account the nature of the concern, the age of the student, and their emotional wellbeing. Where appropriate, some concerns may be addressed through classroom-based support and pastoral strategies before or alongside counselling intervention.

### **Confidentiality and Record Keeping**

Students have a right to confidentiality; however, this cannot be guaranteed where there is a risk of harm to the student or others. Students are informed of these limits to confidentiality at the outset of counselling.

Counselling records are kept to a minimum and stored securely. Notes are factual and professional and are used solely to support ongoing provision.

The **counseling folder** Includes:

Information sheet with the following details:

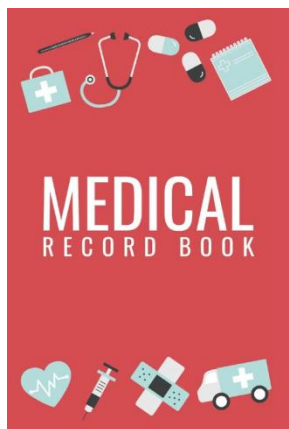
1. Student Details (Name, Class, D.O.B)
2. Contact Details
3. School Counsellor's notes
4. Counselling request/ referral
5. Any report from pediatrician/psychiatrist/educational psychologist (if applicable)
6. Counselling goals/Individual Behaviour Plan (IBP)
7. Informal screening forms & student worksheets
8. Meeting notes between teachers/parents



The department uses the DSM 5 criteria as a guideline for initial informal diagnosis. Once a child is identified to have any Special Educational Needs and/or Psycho-Emotional difficulties, the student is referred to an external psychologist for further recommendations or a formal diagnosis.



## Medical Information



The school's Medical Record is updated as and when information comes into the school clinic. Any major changes or necessary information are passed on to the school counselor. Some medical conditions may have a significant impact on a child's experiences and the way they function in school. If these are not properly managed, they could hinder their access to education. Therefore, consultation and open discussion between the child's parents, the school, the school doctor and any specialist services providing treatment for the child will be essential to ensure that the child makes maximum progress.

## Referrals

Referrals to the school counsellor may be initiated voluntarily by students or parents, or formally by staff members and school leadership.

- **Voluntary referrals:** Students and parents may directly approach the counsellor to request support. Such referrals remain confidential in line with the school's Confidentiality and Record Keeping procedures.
- **Staff-initiated referrals:** Where concerns are identified by teachers, pastoral staff, or school leadership, parents must be informed of the referral by the concerned staff. Parental consent is required for the counsellor's involvement, particularly in the Primary Section, and this is obtained prior to ongoing counselling support.

All referrals must be formally communicated to the counsellor via official school email addresses to ensure appropriate documentation and continuity of care.

Where concerns are assessed as exceeding the scope of school-based counselling, parents are consulted and referrals to appropriately licensed external professionals are recommended. In such cases, records of referrals, parental communication, and follow-up actions are maintained in accordance with KHDA expectations, safeguarding requirements, and the school's Confidentiality and Record Keeping procedures.



## **Process for walk-in appointments or behavioral concerns during school hours**

### **For students in the Primary Section (Years 1–6):**

During school hours, the class teacher is required to issue a slip confirming that the student is being sent to the School Counsellor during the lesson.

- In matters relating to classroom incidents or concerns, the class teacher must first speak with the School Counsellor to discuss the situation before sending the student, or where further discussion regarding a particular student is required.
- For counselling referrals that are not safeguarding-related, the class teacher must obtain parental consent by email before referring the student to the School Counsellor.

### **For students in the Secondary Section:**

Students from Years 7 to A-level can make an appointment with the senior counselor as needed; preferably in their Activity/Supervised Studies and/or other lessons in case of an emergency. The concerned teacher will provide a slip to confirm that the student was sent to the counsellor during his/her period.

## **Preventive Measures**

The school adopts a proactive and preventative approach to student wellbeing and safeguarding through curriculum provision, pastoral structures, student leadership, and parent partnership.

All classes have a timetabled Moral Education program, supplemented by PSHE and Psychology (where applicable), which provides structured opportunities to discuss important issues such as equality, friendship, respect, rights and responsibilities, social skills, emotional regulation, and positive decision-making. In the upper years, the Psychology curriculum supports students in understanding mental health and wellbeing, including topics such as stress, anxiety, depression, addiction, and appropriate coping strategies and interventions, helping students to develop resilience, self-awareness, and informed help-seeking behaviours. These lessons promote open discussion in a supportive, non-judgmental environment and contribute to students' personal and social development.

Teachers make purposeful use of registration periods, class time, zero lessons, and pastoral sessions to check in with students, identify ongoing concerns, and reinforce key messages related to positive habits, stress management, emotional wellbeing, anti-bullying, school rules, and appropriate conduct. The school's No Touch Policy is clearly communicated and consistently enforced as a safeguarding measure to protect all students and staff.

School rules and expected standards of behaviour are regularly revisited during registration, assemblies, classroom discussions, and throughout the school year. Behaviours such as name-calling, bullying, physical aggression, harassment, or disruptive conduct are taken seriously and addressed in line with the school's Behaviour and Anti-Bullying Policies. The Marian Promise, which summarizes expected student behaviour, is reinforced through orientation programs and displayed prominently across classrooms and corridors.

The prefectorial body and student leadership teams play an active role in promoting a culture of tolerance, inclusion, and well-being. Designated student leadership roles, including anti-bullying and well-being leaders within classes, support peer awareness and act as positive role models. Prefects regularly engage with younger students through small-group sessions to reinforce messages related to anti-bullying, healthy choices, and respectful behaviour.

In the Secondary Section, student wellbeing monitoring tools and software (such as Komodo) are used by teachers and counsellors to support the identification of wellbeing concerns, enabling timely pastoral intervention.

The school also organizes campaigns and awareness initiatives, including Anti-Bullying Week assemblies, themed wellbeing activities, and talks delivered by internal staff or external professionals, where appropriate.

Parents are encouraged to contact the school should they have any concerns regarding their child's well-being. Opportunities to meet with the counsellor are provided during scheduled parent-teacher meetings, held three times a year, and additional appointments may be arranged as required.

### **Use of the Komodo Wellbeing Platform**

The school uses Komodo, a digital wellbeing platform, to support the monitoring and promotion of student wellbeing, particularly in the upper year groups. The platform\_ forms part of the school's preventive and early-identification approach to student welfare and complements existing pastoral, counselling, and safeguarding structures.

Students in the older classes complete a monthly wellbeing survey, reflecting on areas such as emotional wellbeing, stress levels, sleep, eating habits, relationships, and overall school experience. This regular check-in supports student self-awareness and provides the school with timely insights into emerging concerns.

### **Student Voice and Access to Support:**

The platform allows students to request check-ins confidentially, including the option to do so anonymously, with a specific teacher, the Child Protection Officer, or the school counsellor. This feature promotes help-seeking behaviour and ensures students know how to access support safely and effectively.

### **Role of Teachers:**

Teachers use Komodo to monitor overall wellbeing scores and trends at class level, rather than focusing on individual diagnostic outcomes. Patterns such as poor sleep, heightened stress, or concerns around routine and self-care help inform registration time, zero lessons, and pastoral conversations, enabling teachers to respond proactively. Teachers may also respond to student-requested check-ins generated through the platform and flag concerns where necessary.



All relevant staff receive training in Mental Health First Aid, delivered by the school counsellor with support from the IT team, to ensure they can interpret data, respond appropriately to student needs, and understand referral procedures. Staff are guided in tracking wellbeing trends, monitoring individual and class-level patterns, and taking early action to support students.

### **Role of the Counsellor:**

The school counsellor monitors students who record consistently or significantly low wellbeing scores. Where concerns are identified, the counsellor conducts follow-up check-ins with the student and, where appropriate, involves parents to ensure a holistic approach to support. Individual support plans may be developed collaboratively with the student, parents, and relevant staff. The counsellor also liaises with teachers, pastoral leaders, and school leadership to coordinate appropriate in-school support and referrals where necessary.

All use of the platform is conducted in line with the school's Confidentiality, Safeguarding, and Child Protection policies, ensuring that student wellbeing data is handled sensitively, responsibly, and for the sole purpose of supporting student welfare and development.

### **Career Guidance/Information Service:**

The Career Guidance and Information Service supports students in Years 8 to 11 & Alevels in planning academic pathways, exploring career interests and opportunities, and receiving guidance through the university application and selection process.

The service aims to support students in making informed and appropriate decisions based on their strengths, interests and future goals.

Students are informed about career and university fairs taking place in the UAE and are encouraged to attend to gain exposure to a wide range of post-school options.

During the academic year, Year 8 and Year 11 students are invited to participate in psychometric and aptitude assessments (offered through external providers and subject to parental consent and applicable fees). These assessments support students in selecting suitable subjects for the following academic year.

The school hosts university fairs and information sessions throughout the year, welcoming representatives from universities in the UAE, Canada, UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand and Europe. Students in Years 10, 11 and A-Level are encouraged to attend sessions that provide guidance on entry requirements, application processes and timelines.

Students also receive structured information sessions on topics including:

- Writing an effective personal statement
- CV building and profile development
- Overview of international application processes
- Country-specific entry requirements and timelines

The primary function of the Career Guidance Service is to provide clear and unbiased information on a wide range of academic and career pathways to support informed decision-making.

Where opportunities allow, students may participate in university orientation visits within the UAE, subject to parental consent. Students are also encouraged to engage in community service and school-based volunteering to develop transferable skills and strengthen their student profiles.

The School Counsellor provides guidance and support with:

- Completion of university application forms
- Uploading required academic transcripts and documents on Common App
- Reviewing and supporting completion of students' UCAS profiles
- Submission of counsellor and school references
- Understanding application timelines and requirements
- Providing counsellor referrals upon request

### **Psychological Screening and External Referral**

Where concerns arise, the school uses internal screening tools and observations to identify learning or behavioural needs. The school does not conduct psychological diagnosis. Following a teacher referral, parental consent is obtained and information from checklists, classroom observations and relevant academic data is reviewed by the School Counsellor and specialist staff. Students who meet agreed criteria may be placed on the At Risk Register and provided with targeted in-class and one-to-one support without a formal diagnosis.

Progress is monitored closely, and where needs fall outside the scope of school intervention, parents are guided to seek assessment from licensed, ministry-approved professionals. With parental consent, external recommendations are shared with staff to support consistent follow-up.

An Individual Behaviour Plan (IBP) is developed for students requiring targeted behavioural support. Each IBP includes up to three targets, clear objectives, success criteria, preventive strategies, positive reinforcement, consequences for non-compliance and home-based strategies. Plans are developed collaboratively with input from the student, parents and teachers, monitored regularly through one-to-one sessions, and formally reviewed at the end of each academic term.



### **Roles and responsibilities**

All staff share responsibility for safeguarding and student wellbeing. The Counsellor, in collaboration with the Child Protection Officer, leads on pastoral support, record-keeping, staff guidance, and referrals.

### **Success Criteria**

The policy will be considered to be successful if:

- There is an increased awareness and understanding of the importance of listening to student concerns.
- Students feel that there are people who have time to listen to them and also to steer them toward those who can help them further.
- Students with concerns are dealt with sensitively and in confidence, if appropriate.
- Students are provided with adequate information and given appropriate guidance in order to make correct choices for their subject choices/university selection.

### **Policy Review**

This policy would read in conjunction with the following policies:

- ✓ St. Mary's Catholic High School's Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy,
- ✓ St. Mary's Catholic High School's Admission Policy,
- ✓ St. Mary's Catholic High School SEND/Inclusion Policy,
- ✓ SMCHS Behaviour Policy,
- ✓ SMCHS Anti-Bullying Policy,
- ✓ SMCHS Cyber-Bullying Policy.

The counseling policy will be reviewed on a yearly basis.

Next Review Date: June 2026

**THE CHILD PROTECTION AND SAFEGUARDING POLICY ADDENDUM DURING COVID 19 IS AN IMPORTANT UPDATE FOR PROTOCOLS FOLLOWED IN THIS POLICY.**