

BISHOPS

Policy on Confidentiality

PREAMBLE:

In the Schools' Counselling Department, dealing with dramatic and earth shattering revelations is the exception – most counselling revolves around feelings, perceptions and inter-personal relationships. In these cases confidentiality is all important because for a Counsellor to violate the trust of a pupil who has come to him or her with feelings of guilt, inferiority, vulnerability or shame is inexcusable. Trust is the basis of the counselling relationship and should, under these circumstances, be preserved.

THE POLICY STATEMENT:

The school recognizes that confidentiality and trust are the basis of a counselling relationship and should, as a rule, be protected. However, the School Counsellor works with the delegated authority of the Headmaster who is ultimately responsible for the welfare of the pupils in the school. As such, in certain rare and severe situations (as outlined below), it may be necessary for the Counsellor to pass on information to the Headmaster, who in turn should respect confidentiality and best interests of the pupil.

It is the responsibility of the Counsellor to inform the Headmaster when a pupil has revealed to him and he has verified (as far as possible) that (1) conditions exist which may harm individuals for whom the school is responsible, or (2) pupils within the school are involved in illegal activity.

Information should be passed on to the Headmaster (and no one else without the Headmaster's permission) in an ethical way. This should always be done in such a way that the pupil is protected as much as is possible. The Counsellor should always attempt to gain the permission of the pupil before passing on the information to the Headmaster, but must use his or her judgement as to whether that permission is necessary.

GUIDELINES ON CONFIDENTIALITY FOR STAFF

You may receive information about a pupil in one of two ways:

1. A Counsellor, Housemaster or Tutor may provide you with confidential information about a pupil because it is felt that it is necessary for you to have access to that information so that you can perform your normal duties more effectively.

2. A boy or his family may provide you with confidential information about a situation or set of circumstances.

Both types of information are to be treated sensitively, in accordance with the guidelines laid out below.

In the case of (1) above:

- a. You should not discuss this information with any other member of staff or other pupils, unless you are specifically asked to.
- b. Under no circumstances should the situation be discussed or the information shared with individuals outside the school, including other parents.
- c. You should not raise the matter with the boy himself, unless you have been advised that it is in order to do so.
- d. If the information is provided to you in writing, you should not keep the documentation in any place where another member of staff or a pupil might see it.

In the case of (2) above:

- a. You should remember that the Headmaster is ultimately responsible for the welfare of all the boys in the school. As such you have a responsibility to report significant information (which you feel is too sensitive with a Housemaster, Counsellor or Chaplain) to him.
- b. If the pupil requires a guarantee of confidentiality from you before sharing information with you, you should only provide such a guarantee with the proviso 'as long as the information does not involve danger to you or anyone else' or is not of an illegal nature.
- c. Consider the welfare and safety of the child before sharing or not disclosing information about a pupil. You should always endeavour to act in the best interests of the child.
- d. Consider why the pupil has shared the information with you. What is he expecting you to do? Frequently students share information with staff because they expect the staff to do something with the information.
- e. If you are in doubt about how to handle a situation you are advised to discuss it with a Counsellor, the Chaplain or the VP (Pastoral) in confidence before deciding what to do.
- f. You should not discuss this information with any other member of staff or other pupils, unless specifically asked to.
- g. Under no circumstances should the situation be discussed or the information shared with individuals outside the school, including other parents.

It may become apparent to you that a pupil in your care is receiving counselling but the person responsible for the counselling regards the reason for the boy seeing him to be of such a nature that they can not advise you of the reason. In such circumstances you are asked to respect the pupil's right to privacy and to trust the Counsellors' professionalism in choosing not to share the information with you.

GUIDELINES ON THE USE OF BSU NOTES

The context of BSU notes is highly confidential and private. As such staff should exercise extreme sensitivity in reading, interpreting and using the information contained in the notes. With this in mind, the general guidelines on confidentiality outlined above apply to BSU notes.

In addition, the following specific guidelines are also to be applied to BSU notes:

1. These notes should not be displayed on your computer monitor in the presence of pupils.
2. Be conscious of the fact that if you are logged into the staff notice board on the intranet and you leave your computer unattended, other individuals will be able to gain access to the information stored in the BSU notes. Such action would be considered highly negligent.
3. Do not make reference to any of the information contained in BSU notes in pupil's reports. The content of the BSU notes is for your reference and should not be referred to in any document which is public.
4. When reading this information, be ever mindful of pupils' and their families' right to privacy. Sharing this information violates these rights.

If you have any doubts or queries about the contents of BSU notes, the implications of the information contained therein; or the use of this information, they should be raised with a Counsellor.