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Template for Remote Counselling Consent (14 and older)

Introduction

At <INSERT NAME OF SCHOOL>, we recognize that changes in working, living, and learning environments as a result of COVID-19 and physical distancing have the potential to create added stress and anxiety for students. It may also be important for some students to access counselling services that they were receiving prior to the COVID-19 outbreak.

When the school want to make sure students do not contract COVID-19, we also want to ensure that they are mentally and emotionally coping with these unusual circumstances. To help support students, we are therefore making arrangements to make "virtual" counselling supports available during this time.

What is Virtual Counselling?

Virtual or online counselling support has the same purpose or intention as counselling sessions that are conducted in person. However, due to the COVID-19 outbreak and physical distancing, students and counsellors will connect using online platforms available through third party providers rather than meeting face to face.

What about confidentiality?

The confidentiality obligations that apply to counselling sessions are not affected by the fact that services are delivered in a "virtual" environment.

In accessing counselling services, students may:

- Refuse or withdraw consent to participate. (This will not affect the student's right to access counselling services in the future.)
- Expect that school will maintain the confidentiality of personal information that is discussed with your child during counselling sessions.

However, information obtained through counselling sessions may still be subject to disclosure in the following limited circumstances:

- With the student's consent;
- If the student is at risk of harming themselves or harming someone else;
- If the student is at risk of being harmed by someone else;
- If the law requires that the counsellor makes a report or disclosure (e.g. to child protection authorities when a child is in need of protection);
- If the law requires disclosure, such as where a subpoena or court order is issued.



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In some cases, a limited amount of personal information may also be shared with school authorities in order to help support the student.

All personal information collected by counsellors is collected under the authority of the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* and the School Act, and is collected, used, and disclosed for the purposes described above.

What about information sharing with parents?

Our practices regarding sharing information with parents have also not changed when counselling is delivered online. Sometimes parent(s) or guardian(s) are interested in a student's counselling progress and may want to speak with the counsellor. Except as described above, information about what is discussed confidentially with students is only shared with parents in consultation with students and in the student's best interests. This is to ensure that any disclosures do not harm the ongoing trust relationship between the counsellor and the student.

What about privacy?

The school intends to make online counselling sessions available through <insert name of school district approved platform> (for example, Zoom or doxyme.com) video conferencing platforms. We encourage parents and students to review <insert link to video conferencing school district approved platform> (example: Zoom's privacy policy <https://zoom.us/privacy/>).

There are also important steps that students and parents must take to preserve the privacy and confidentiality of these sessions, including:

- permitting students to access sessions from a private space at home so that sessions cannot be overheard by others;
- using password protected online connections;
- avoid use of public Wi-Fi networks which may not be secure;
- refraining from use of Facebook or other services to sign in to <insert name of video conferencing platform>
- refraining from recording sessions; and ensuring all meeting invitations, passwords, and links to access sessions are kept private and secure.

Online counselling services and care may not be as complete as face-to-face services, and counsellors may recommend/refer students to alternate services or supports to better support their needs. If you would prefer that your child access counselling services using a different method, please let us know.



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Other limitation that may apply?

As with any counselling service, students may benefit from online support, but results cannot be guaranteed or assured. In some cases, counselling may be ineffective or cause other issues to arise. If a student's circumstances or mental health appears to be worsening, this should be discussed with the counsellor and alternatives considered.

Online counselling is also not intended as an emergency service. Students who are in crisis, considering self-harm, or facing an emergency should call 9-1-1 or proceed to the nearest hospital emergency room for help. Students can also access the Crisis Centre at 604-872-3311 for free 24-hour support or the Kids Help Phone at 1-800-668-6868 (kidshelpphone.ca) or text them by texting CONNECT to 686868.

How to access remote counselling services

Students who wish to access counselling services should email a school counsellor at one of the addresses below. Please ensure that you indicate that you understand and agree to the above terms.