

Spring  
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# Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Support



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Based on Cathy Dewhurst's work as part of  
the Feelings Place Counselling Project  
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## Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing Service

### **Introduction:**

The Village School is committed to supporting the student's health and wellbeing including their social and emotional needs. Thus, the school has commissioned the Feelings Place Counselling Project to provide support to develop these areas through therapeutic play. The aim of this service is to provide accessible, flexible, confidential and professional therapeutic support for vulnerable pupils who are experiencing a range of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Without appropriate support these difficulties can seriously affect a young person's global development and their capacity to learn and engage fully in school life.

### ***What is Counselling?***

Counselling is like lending another brain to help you think, process and make sense of what is going on in your life. Counselling can help develop emotional intelligence and remove barriers to becoming emotionally attuned in relationships with family, friends and partners. Most importantly, it will help nurture a relationship with yourself; building confidence and self-reflection skills, and so improve how you feel about yourself as a person in this world. Counselling can be liberating for the client, however, it can be a painful process and so it is of no surprise that some children and young people want to avoid it. Having a clear definite space available is important and part of making it easier for the child/young person to engage.

### ***What is Play Therapy?***

Play therapy is about providing a safe space for children and young people to express their feelings and process some of their experiences through the medium of play. It can take time to build up trust and so the initial stages of play therapy would be about bonding. It is important that there are no interruptions to the therapy when it is happening.

### ***What is Dance & Movement Therapy?***

Dance & Movement Therapy uses physical movement to help you feel a greater connection between your mind, your body, your emotions and your capacity to communicate. It is based on the principle that movement reflects an individual's patterns of thinking and feeling. The therapist acknowledges and supports the child's movements, encouraging and supporting the development of new movement patterns and emotional experiences. It is used to improve body awareness and help people be aware of 'the self' and 'the other'. This can help to develop relationships, trust and communication skills. A person can engage creatively in this process to improve their emotional, cognitive, physical and social integration. Words are only a small part of how we communicate. Movement is a universal means of communication. For non-verbal children their movement, including movement of the face, can be their main language.

### **Process:**

The students were referred to the Head of Therapies who prioritise the student's needs. Permission slips were sought from parents prior to the commencement of assessment. The counsellor (Cathy Dewhurst) completed a comprehensive assessment including observation of the children in class and interacting with adults and peers; meeting with both parents and teachers where questions were asked to form a baseline of need. An additional permission slip was signed during this meeting with parents as they were able to agree consent as they had been fully informed of the process. There is a focus on obtaining three key issues or concerns about each student. This is ascertained through both the parent and teacher assigning a level as to how concerned they feel at the start and end of the work. This is to measure any changes in how they feel about the child's issues.

It can be harder to measure change for PMLD children and so careful observation of the child before and after is needed as well as producing highly creative and individualised issues/concerns & aims for the work. E.g. looking for a 'decrease in passivity' or a 'greater emotional range' will mean that the observer will need to notice and record what percentage of the child's day is spent 'being passive' and how many different emotions the child regularly displays. The parents and teacher are asked to complete the 'Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire' (SDQ form) before and after the work, as this is to provide a quantitative measure of change for the student.

The Feelings Place Counselling Project is supporting fifteen children with one-to-one weekly counselling sessions which is planned to continue for minimum of one academic year. This is currently achieved by three Counsellors working one day per week at the school seeing five children in the day. This consists with two Play Therapists who work with more cognitively able students and one Dance-Movement Therapist who works with children with severe to profound learning difficulties including physical disability.

It can often take some time for the client to learn to trust the therapist and the process of counselling. Only when they feel safe enough with the therapist, can they start the work of processing their difficult and confusing thoughts and feelings. That is why the therapy needs to be conducted within firm and containing boundaries i.e. the same room, at the same time on the same day, with the same therapist who respects the confidentiality of the material they bring. Thus, the Feeling Room has been set up to cater this ongoing support which is in the drama office. It is essential that there are no interruptions and the privacy of the space is respected. Some sessions will be difficult for the child as they think about painful feelings and they might feel vulnerable when they go back into class. Often themes are repeated over and over until the material is seen in a new light, processed in a new way and then stored in a different part of the brain. The students are currently within their first few weeks of therapy.

#### **Future Plan:**

Fortnightly meetings to occur between Head of Therapies and Counsellor (Cathy Dewhurst). These are vital in ironing out small problems that arise with a new service.

Mid way through the year (July 2018) the counsellor will meet with the parent and teacher. This helps the counsellor see what changes are happening outside the therapy room and helps the parent and teacher notice changes in the child instead of seeing and relating to the child in old and familiar patterns.

A half way report is to be compiled by Cathy Dewhurst reporting the progress of each child.

At the end of the work (February 2019) a report is written on each child that is limited to themes so as not to disrespect the confidentiality of the counselling work that has been given to the child.

A detailed report on the service will be compiled and shared with the school and governors (February 2019).