

# COUNSELLING SERVICES

CODE: P006

Section: Academic/Student

Policy Owner: BOG

Procedure Owner: Student Services Department

## **POLICY**

The policy of the Board of Governors is to provide counselling sessions to all students, allowing them to discuss any concerns or personal matters that are affecting their wellbeing in a confidential setting.

## **PROCEDURES**

### **1. The Philosophy Behind The Practice**

The Counselling Service at ITS is in line with ITS's vision and mission statement, since it focuses on attending to the students' individual psychological needs, which impacts the quality of the service offered by the students to the Tourism and Hospitality Industry.

Through the establishment of a safe, supportive and non-judgemental therapeutic relationship, Counselling aids students in exploring their challenges, discovering their strengths and managing their difficulties in more effective ways. This process promotes personal growth and leads to healthier, stronger individuals with more stable and fulfilling lives.

This positively impacts the students' academic achievements and also their success in current and future workplaces.

The Counselling Service is aware and respectful of the diversity of therapeutic disciplines, techniques and approaches, and considers them all to be equally valid and effective forms of therapy. All practitioners at the ITS Counselling Service are committed to collaborating with each other using their different methods to support the students.

### **2. Description of the Service and Responsibilities**

The ITS Counselling Services are offered free of charge to all students and members of staff.

Students and staff members will be treated as unique individuals who choose to develop at their own pace irrelevant of their age, race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, social class, political affiliation, ability or any other form of diversity.

The ITS Counselling Service is committed to offering high-quality service which is:

- i. client focused;
- ii. growth oriented in a non-judgemental therapeutic context of understanding;
- iii. delivered by appropriately qualified practitioners in a safe environment; and
- iv. supportive of the therapeutic process.

## INSTITUTE OF TOURISM STUDIES

The ITS Counselling Service is responsible of offering the following services:

- i. one-to-one counselling sessions by appointment;
- ii. group sessions;
- iii. family and couple sessions when necessary;
- iv. consultations with lecturing staff to support students when needed;
- v. planning and facilitating workshops, talks, seminars, group discussions and group work for students or staff members;
- vi. provision of a range of information on a wide variety of topics available in printed format and/or on ITS website;
- vii. liaising with and referring to internal and external agencies, professionals, specialists, etc.;
- viii. liaising and working with the other sections of Student Support Services when necessary;
- ix. liaising with the management, academic or administrative staff when necessary;
- x. establishing evaluative procedures about client satisfaction and conducting research relating to the service being offered by the Unit;
- xi. maintaining appropriate levels of supervision;
- xii. participating in regular in-service consultation, ongoing training and professional development.

The room used for Counselling should be appropriate for counselling, situated in a quiet, safe, accessible yet discreet location, which supports a confidential setting in a warm environment. Students and staff should as much as possible make use of the ITS Counselling Service during their free time. Counselling sessions usually last about 45 minutes and service users may attend on a weekly basis, fortnightly basis or in other ways according to their individual needs. Service users are offered a maximum of 10 sessions per academic year, which can be extended to 15 sessions if necessary.

Practitioners will develop and maintain an effective network of external referral agencies and refer service users as necessary.

The service by ITS Counselling Service is offered throughout the academic year, including during Christmas and Easter holidays as well as during the Summer period.

### **3. Ethical Conduct**

Practitioners providing a service at the ITS Counselling Service are bound to adhere to the ethical frameworks of their respective professions.

The service offered by the ITS Counselling Service is of the highest possible level of confidentiality in order to respect the service users' privacy and create the trust which is necessary for counselling. Confidentiality and its limits are explained to all service users during their initial sessions. The practitioner will not pass on any

information regarding service users to third parties without the informed consent of the service user. In exceptional circumstances, the counsellor may take the decision to breach confidentiality with or without the service user's consent if necessary, where in their professional judgement there is a risk of the service user being seriously harmed or harming themselves, there is a risk of another person being seriously harmed or there is a risk of a serious crime being committed. In these circumstances, the practitioner should always inform the service user about the disclosure and with whom it will occur. The counsellor may also in exceptional circumstances be legally required to disclose information.

Practitioners are bound to inform the Student Support Services Coordinator or the Executive Director of service users who manifest serious risk of posing grave harm to themselves or to others. If the threat is imminent, referral to an appropriate service or mental health professional needs to be done as soon as possible if this is considered to be the best course of action. It is the practitioner's responsibility to adequately discuss any referrals with the service users. It may also be necessary to work closely with the concerned professionals in the management of the case.

Conflict of interest should be avoided. The practitioners are responsible not to create dual relationships with service users. Practitioners need to consider the implications of their involvement in activities other than counselling sessions which could potentially limit client-intake or damage the therapeutic relationship with the service users e.g. grading students' academic work; being involved in taking disciplinary action against students or members of staff, etc.

In order to maintain high professional and ethical standards, practitioners are required to manage their weekly amount of contact hours, which should not exceed 20 hours. This needs to be done with consideration to the severity of the cases.

Practitioners are to avoid cancellation of appointments as much as possible. Where this is unavoidable, service users are to be notified as early as possible. In the event that the practitioner is on sick-leave, service users are to be immediately contacted and informed by a team-member from the Student Support Services. The practitioner will contact them upon returning to work and offer a new appointment.

#### **4. Record Keeping**

All records made by practitioners regarding their work with service users are confidential and are the property of the ITS Counselling Service. These records are anonymous and are to be kept in a safe and secure location. Records will be destroyed 5 years after the termination of counselling.

## **5. Choice of Counsellor**

Should the service user have a preference regarding which counsellor to work with, they may request this before the start of the counselling process. If the preferred counsellor is not available, the service user is given the choice of being assigned to another counsellor or else to wait until the preferred counsellor is available.

If a service user wishes to change counsellor after the counselling process has started, the service user is initially encouraged to discuss this issue with his/her current counsellor. If the service user still wishes to make the change, the current counsellor must first discuss with the service user whether there is any information which needs to be passed on to the new counsellor. If this is the case, the information is to be passed on in the most respectful manner possible.

## **6. Accountability**

In order to maintain a professional standard of service, ITS Counselling Service offers a transparent procedure for the investigation of complaints regarding practitioners' conduct. If there are any concerns about the conduct of a practitioner, service users are encouraged to initially address this with the practitioner concerned. If this route is not satisfactory, then contact with the Student Support Services Coordinator or the Executive Director is encouraged. ITS authorities will investigate and process the matter according to ITS protocol.

## **7. Quality of Service**

When concluding counselling, service users will be asked to complete an anonymous 'Counselling Feedback Sheet' at their discretion. The feedback gathered is used to gain a better understanding of the service users' expectations, perceptions and effectiveness of the service.

Non-identifying data consisting of statistical information related to the overall running of the unit is also collected in order to better evaluate the service which is being offered. This information is to be kept in a safe and secure location.

## **8. Contacting the ITS Counselling Unit**

Students and staff members who wish to make use of the ITS Counselling Service may either contact the Counselling Unit directly or may be referred by other staff members, parents, external agencies or other professionals. In such cases, the person who is being referred should be notified about the referral and permission to refer should be granted whenever possible.

## **9. Students who have Graduated/Resigned**

Service users who have graduated or resigned from ITS are offered at least another 2 sessions to conclude, explore all options available to find a way forward and guided towards alternative sources of help if the service user wishes to continue counselling.