

Counselling Practitioner Support in Schools

Definition of Service

The Awhi Mai Awhi Atu (Counselling in Schools) initiative is a response to emerging wellbeing and mental health concerns. Counselling Practitioners can play an important role in supporting ākonga hauora and wellbeing. Strengthening wellbeing enhances engagement, participation, learning, and relationships with others.

Recognising the unique needs and contexts of schools, communities, and regions, the models of practice offered by counselling in schools' practitioners will draw on a range of contexts and approaches. These may include more traditional talk-based and/or activity based experiential approaches that use, for example, the arts, play, outdoor activities, grounded in te ao Māori or other culturally informed practices, as the contexts for support. All approaches will be evidence based, developmentally and age appropriate, culturally sustaining, and responsive to the strengths, needs and motivations of the ākonga and whānau.

Providers of 'Counselling Practitioner Support in Schools'

This initiative can be delivered by counselling practitioners, reflecting the diverse contexts and needs across communities and regions. All counselling practitioners must either be registered with their appropriate professional body, or where there is no professional body, be supervised by someone who is registered with and accountable to a professional body. All counselling practitioners will be qualified or experienced and engaged in regular professional learning and external supervision. All practitioners will have expertise and experience in working with tamariki, rangatahi, and whānau, be culturally responsive, and use sound, developmentally appropriate, evidence-informed methodologies. Counselling practitioners are expected to be flexible and responsive in their way of working to meet the needs of ākonga and whānau, within the context of their school and community.

Information about who a counselling practitioner maybe

Counselling practitioners who are registered with a professional body may include:

Counsellors, Social Workers, Occupational Therapists, Psychotherapists, Psychologists, Creative Art Therapists, Music Therapists, Teachers, and Mental Health Nurses.

Communities and providers may request to utilise counselling practitioners who are not registered with a professional body. In such cases, there will be a requirement to work under the supervision of a counselling practitioner who is registered to a professional body. Examples could include:

- Facilitators of Equine Therapy, Master Carvers, Rongoā Māori Practitioners.

Qualifications and Registration Requirements:

Providers must use evidence based and methodologies that meet the needs of their clients. They must have:

- an appropriate qualification, professional learning record and professional referees
- be registered (or supervised by someone who is registered) with an appropriate professional body with an accreditation process, code of ethics, ongoing professional development, supervision, and a formal complaints process.

Providers must demonstrate that there is appropriate professional supervision and clinical oversight in place. Proof of experience, qualifications and police and safety checks must be provided to the Ministry of Education and updates provided when requested.

How counselling practitioners work and how can they help

Community contracted providers draw on a range of skills, approaches, and interventions to support ākonga wellbeing in the context of their whānau, kura, and community. They help ākonga to better manage their emotions, navigate their relationships with others, become more resilient, confident, and calm. This is an 'early in the life of a problem' approach. This does not replace mental health support from relevant health services for significant or long-term concerns and whānau should continue to access these services when required.

Support can be sought for emerging wellbeing and mental health concerns such as those identified below

- Anxiety (including reluctance to come to school, avoidance of social situations, sleeping, eating issues)
- Friendship and peer relationship issues
- Emotional regulation (difficulty managing disappointment, sharing with others, peer conflict)
- Disengagement from learning (avoidance of activities, tasks, people)
- Managing grief, change, and loss
- Impact of early or ongoing traumatic experiences
- Navigating whānau changes such as parental separation, foster care, Oranga Tamariki involvement
- Whānau requests for support for tamariki and/or parenting concerns
- Wellbeing concerns affecting Taha Tinana, Taha Wairua, Taha Whānau, Taha Hinengaro.

The counselling practitioner provides support across three tiers, described within the different approaches below. Evidence supports involvement of whānau as much as possible, particularly for younger tamariki. Helping the relevant adults who are supporting the ākonga with strategies to continue with the support after the sessions are complete is also an important goal.

Whole-school Approach

- Support for teachers to promote wellbeing with ākonga and whānau.
- Support for school leaders to enhance and promote wellbeing through the curriculum and school/Kura culture.

Group - Targeted Approach

- Group sessions for tamariki, or tamariki and whānau targeting topics based on an identified area of need. The number of sessions will be determined in consultation with whānau and kaiako. Group size and composition for tamariki groups will be

determined by identified needs, health and safety, and opportunities to nurture 'tuakana - teina' peer relationships.

Individualised Approach

For older ākonga the whānau and provider may agree that an individualised approach will be beneficial. Up to 5 sessions followed by a review will be the likely offering, with whānau included as much as possible. In collaboration with the ākonga, and whānau, the counsellor or practitioner will set one or two key goals to work towards during the sessions. For more complex challenges, the counsellor will encourage the whānau to seek help via their GP or other relevant service.

Whānau Support

- Drop in sessions.
- Phone guidance or zoom/ TEAMS sessions.
- Child and whānau therapy sessions.

Integrating with other supports within the school and with other agencies

To support a joined-up approach the counselling practitioner will:

- join networks as a part of the school pastoral care or wellbeing team;
- provide input and support to pastoral or wellbeing teams about best practice responses to the needs of ākonga;
- contribute to interagency meetings where this has been agreed by all parties and
- work closely with Social Workers in Schools or School Guidance Counsellors as needed.

Challenging behaviour concerns or situations will continue to be referred to Ministry of Education Learning Support or RTLB depending on the seriousness of the concern. Concerns about [sexualised behaviour](#) or abuse will continue to be referred to a relevant service.

The Ministry of Education will continue to provide support following a traumatic incident in consultation with the school. Counselling practitioner support may be asked to contribute to the strategies recommended by the school, or other services involved with the ākonga, with whānau agreement.

How support is accessed by ākonga, their whānau and school staff

In most instances, counselling practitioner support will be delivered with the consent of a ākonga's whānau and relevant school staff. Whānau can directly request that ākonga receives counselling practitioner support, or a teacher can make a recommendation for counselling practitioner support for a student. The child or young person must be willing to receive the support. Where a student under 16 years old is recommended for counselling practitioner support by a school staff member, their whānau will be informed and included in discussion about what is needed, provided it is appropriate and safe for this to occur. Whānau may also request a phone call or zoom/ TEAMS hui with the counsellor. They can make this request to their community provider.

Exception: In the case of care and protection concerns, or a likely situation that could cause harm to the ākonga, the counselling practitioner or their clinical supervisor will take immediate action. If the ākonga is in immediate danger call the Police on 111. In all other situations you should follow your Child Protection Policy that you are required to have under the Children's Act 2014.

Ākonga can choose to access counselling and have the right to decline counselling when it is offered to them. Ākonga may approach the counselling practitioner and make a request for counselling or ask a teacher or friend to do this on their behalf. If this happens, the counselling practitioner will work with the child to determine the best approach to involve whānau and the school in the support. **While whānau consent is the preferred approach, young people aged 16 years and older can give informed consent to receive counselling practitioner support without the need for parental permission.**

Parental consent process for ākonga under 16 years to access the support

Parents/caregivers will be informed of their rights to information that will be used for reporting and analysis, of the pilot, privacy, consent, and confidentiality through information sessions/newsletters/school web site/ emails/ and again if their child is referred to counselling practitioner support. The need for a referral will be agreed with whānau and ākonga. Once counselling has been prioritised for the ākonga, the counselling practitioner will meet with the whānau to gain informed consent for the support.

Ākonga under 16 years can also make decisions about their health, including whether they wish to receive counselling practitioner support. However, a counselling practitioner needs to determine whether a ākonga aged under 16 years has the maturity and understanding (competency) to give informed consent. Where a counselling practitioner determines that the ākonga does not have this competency, parental consent must be sought before any support is provided.

Privacy and Confidentiality

All ākonga have the right to privacy and confidentiality regarding any information they share with a counselling practitioner. Counselling practitioner support can only be offered in appropriate environments, comfortable, and safe spaces where ākonga can share information in private.

Counselling practitioners also have specific legal obligations when dealing with ākonga personal information. A counselling practitioner may only use and disclose this information with the ākonga's consent, or in limited circumstances where they believe the ākonga's safety or wellbeing is at risk.

Counselling practitioners must inform ākonga that they are collecting their personal information, the purpose for which it is being collected, and who the information may be shared with and for what purpose. Ākonga's personal information must be kept safe, secure, and private in line with your provider service agreement.

Ākonga can ask to see their personal information that has been collected and held by counselling practitioners. They are also entitled to request correction of information held about them.

Parents/whānau do not have automatic right to access information that a counselling practitioner holds about their tamariki. Requests from parents/whānau can be refused in circumstances such as

where the ākonga does not want the information disclosed, or where disclosure would not be in the ākonga's best interests.