



Ministry of Education, Heritage & Arts

## POLICY ON SCHOOL COUNSELING

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## **1.0 POLICY OBJECTIVE**

The purpose of this policy is to provide clear guidelines to all school counselors at the Ministry of Education, Heritage & Arts (herein after referred to as MoEHA) schools and offices when applying interventions and proactive measures designed to support the social, emotional and behavioral well-being of students, teachers and school environment.

## **2.0 BACKGROUND**

### **2.1 Introduction**

2.1.1 The Ministry of Education has a total number of 731 Primary and 175 secondary schools. There are no established counseling positions in the Primary schools whereas out of the 175 secondary schools, there are only 29 established school counseling positions in large secondary schools. Besides this, there are four (4) Divisional Counselors based in each Division who are responsible to provide student services to all schools under their jurisdiction. Further to this, there are three (3) Counselors based at the National Substance Abuse and Advisory Council (NSAAC) office who also provide school and community based training and counseling services. There are also external counseling support services available to general public such as Empower Pacific, Lifeline Fiji and Medical Services Pacific. The Medical Services Pacific is also contracted by the Department of Social welfare which has a 24 hour Child Helpline Services to register and refer child protection concern/complains on abuse and neglect cases.

2.1.2 MoEHA recognizes that children may face a variety of difficulties and challenges whilst at school, which impact on the chances of success and progression. Students have the right to expect informed, impartial, supportive and timely guidance and counselling services organised by the MoEHA, that affects students' studies and well-being. MoEHA is

committed to providing an effective counselling service, and developing it further to ensure it is accessible and meets the needs of all students whether concerning academic or disciplinary psychotherapy.

## **2.2 Rationale**

2.2.1 The MoEHA is committed in supporting the social, spiritual, emotional and behavioral well-being of students. The Ministry appreciates and value each student's potential to learn and endeavor to provide an environment where students feel safe, respected and supported. School based counseling aims at enhancing learning by assisting students to acquire critical skills in the academic, career and personal/social aspects of student development. Counseling services supports a child's academic, personal and social development which in turn leads to decreased disciplinary issues. School Counselors are bound to use a variety of prevention and intervention models to assist students in overcoming barriers to learning, to make strong connections with educational opportunities in the school, and to ensure that children learn in a safe, healthy and supportive environment. The School Counsellor is in a strategic position to support school improvement initiatives and to be active in advocating and being proactive for better outcomes for all students.

2.2.2 Counseling needs to be an early intervention strategy to prevent deterioration in emotional wellbeing, behavior and attitude. It can enhance a student's self-esteem and ability to cope more effectively in school. Students can be affected from issues relating either to home or school atmosphere.

Issues relating to home may include:

- a) Abuse and negligence
- b) Lack of family support
- c) Irregular attendance
- d) Child labour

Issues relating to school may include:

- a) Bullying
- b) Social and behavioral difficulties
- c) Emotional problems
- d) School refusal/phobia
- e) Truancy
- f) Academic difficulties, for example significant under performance

### **3.0 POLICY**

#### **3.1 Basic Counseling training**

3.1.1 All existing teachers shall undertake basic counseling training provided by MoEHA or its consultants.

3.1.2 It shall be mandatory for all new graduates intending to be employed as teachers at MoEHA to undergo basic counseling training.

3.1.3 At the discretion of the Head teacher/Principal ,counseling services shall be extended to teachers on a case by case basis.

#### **3.2 Accessibility to Counseling Services**

3.2.1 The MoEHA shall provide counseling services accessible to all ECE, Primary, Secondary, vocational and Technical College students, supported by efficient and effective Counselors.

3.2.2 School heads shall ensure that efficient and effective counseling service is available to students at all times.

3.2.3 All challenging cases faced by subject teachers/year teachers that necessitate counseling shall be referred to the Counsellor.

3.2.4 Counselors shall be the Child Protection Officers (CPO) of the school.

3.2.5 A school Counsellor shall also be a member of the Disciplinary, Social and Curriculum (Academic) Committee of the school, who shall at all times act with impartiality and integrity.

3.2.6 A Counsellor shall:

3.2.6.1 have a primary obligation to the student, who is to be treated with respect as a unique individual.

3.2.6.2 be concerned with the educational, academic, career, personal and social needs and encourages the maximum development of every student.

3.2.6.3 respect the student's values and beliefs and does not impose his/her personal values.

3.2.6.4 be knowledgeable of laws, regulations and policies relating to students and strives to protect and inform students regarding their rights.

3.2.6.5 have a maximum of four (4) counseling sessions a day and shall not surpass 10 hours of teaching in a week.

3.2.6.6 refer to MoEHA School Behavioral Management Policy when counseling students on disciplinary related issues.

3.2.7 On case by case basis, challenging counseling incidences shall be referred to relevant school authorities for redress.

3.2.8 Parents/Guardians whose child has undergone counseling shall be informed of their child's case

3.2.9 During cases where there is an unavailability of a school Counselor, at the discretion of the School Head, the incidence shall be immediately referred to another professional Counselor.

3.2.10 A child shall be given the liberty to choose their own teacher counselor whom they feel confident with.

### **3.3 Referral**

3.3.1 A parent or teacher may refer a student for counseling.

3.3.2 Teachers and parents shall complete a Teacher Referral Form (**Appendix 1**) or Parent Referral Form (**Appendix 2**) when referring the student for counseling.

3.3.3 Students are also able to refer themselves and seek an appointment with the Counselor.

3.3.4 It shall be the responsibility of either the teacher or the Counselor to seek the involvement of parents. The student shall be informed of this practice.

3.3.5 In situations where the student specifically requests that parents not be informed, the student may be seen without the knowledge of their parents. However, if the Counsellor and School Head feel that it is in the best interests of the student, the parents shall be informed.

### **3.4 Counseling Services for Teachers**

3.4.1 The Head Teacher or Principal shall refer teachers to the services of the Divisional Counsellor, should the need arise.

3.4.2 The Divisional Counsellor shall furnish a formal written counseling report to the Divisional Education Officer should there be a need.

- 3.4.3 The Divisional Counsellor shall provide a brief update to the Principal/Head Teacher on the school referral made.

### **3.5 Confidentiality**

In maintaining strict confidentiality, the Counsellor shall:

- 3.5.1 inform students of the purposes, goals and the procedure under which they may receive counseling at or before the time when the counseling relationship is entered.
- 3.5.2 inform client of all limits to confidentiality during the initial engagement session.
- 3.5.3 keep information confidential unless disclosure is required to prevent clear and imminent danger to the student or others or when legal requirements demand that confidential information be revealed.
- 3.5.4 consult with appropriate professionals when in doubt as to the validity of an exception.
- 3.5.5 have the ethical responsibility to provide information to an identified third party who, by his/her relationship with the student, is at a high risk of contracting a disease that is commonly known to be communicable and fatal.
- 3.5.6 protect the confidentiality of students' records and releases personal data in accordance with prescribed laws and school policies. Student information stored and transmitted electronically is treated with the same care as traditional student records.

- 3.5.7 protect the confidentiality of information received in the counselling relationship and applicable ethical standards. Such information shall only be revealed to others with the informed consent of the student, consistent with the Counselor's ethical obligation.
- 3.5.8 recognize his/her primary obligation for confidentiality is to the student but balances that obligation with an understanding of the legal and inherent rights of parents/guardians to be the guiding voice in their children's lives.
- 3.5.9 ensure that Head Teacher/Principal or a Teacher of the same gender to the child be present when dealing with child abuse or serious cases.

### 3. Counseling Records

A Counsellor shall:

- 3.6.1 maintain and secure records necessary for rendering professional services to the student as required by laws, regulations, institutional procedures and confidentiality guidelines.
- 3.6.2 keep sole-possession of records separate from students' educational records.
- 3.6.3 keep student records for a period of 7 years after the student has withdrawn from school.
- 3.6.4 establish a reasonable timeline for purging sole-possession records or case notes. Suggested guidelines include shredding sole possession records when the student transitions to the next level, transfers to another school or graduates. Careful discretion and deliberation should be applied before destroying sole-possession records that may be needed by a court of law such as notes on child abuse, suicide, sexual harassment or violence.



3.6.5 When a school Counsellor leaves the school in the event of retirement, transfer or promotion, the Principal/Head teacher shall ensure that the counseling records are transferred to the school Counsellor's successor.

3.6.6 When a student transfers or transits to another school, the counseling record may be transferred when:

- i. the Counsellor at the previous school recommends counselling be continued
- ii. the Counsellor at the receiving school requests it.
- iii. the parent and/or student, as appropriate, requests it.

### **3.7 Counseling Plans**

3.7.1 The school Counsellor shall :

3.7.1.1 Provide students with a comprehensive school counseling program that includes a strong emphasis on working jointly with all students to develop academic and career goals.

3.7.1.2. Advocates for counseling plans supporting students right to choose from the wide array of options when they leave secondary education.

3.7.2 Counselling plans shall be regularly reviewed to update students regarding critical information they need to make informed decisions.

### **3.8 Counselling Space**

3.8.1 All schools shall provide appropriate counselling space that:

3.8.1.1 have a high degree of privacy

3.8.1.2 is furnished with a minimum of four chairs, two tables, book shelves and lockable cabinets.

3.8.1.3 is well ventilated.

3.8.1.4 has telephone and a computer with internet connectivity

### **3.9 Mandatory Reporting of Child Abuse and Neglect Cases**

3.9.1 All school Counselors including teachers are mandated under the *Child Welfare Decree (CWD) 2010* and the *Inter Agency Guideline (IAG) on Child Abuse and Neglect* to report all child abuse and/or neglect cases through their school Principal/Head teacher to the:

- 3.9.1.1 Permanent Secretary for Education, Heritage & Arts,
- 3.9.1.2 Permanent Secretary for Women, Children and Poverty Alleviation,
- 3.9.1.3 Health Department and
- 3.9.1.4 Police Department within 24 hours.

3.9.2 Under the CWD, it is a legal obligation for a teacher to report any suspected or child abuse cases to Department of Social Welfare. Failure to comply with this obligation shall carry a maximum penalty fine of \$5000.00.

3.9.3 In situations mentioned above, students will be informed that Counselors are required by law to break confidentiality and in most cases the Principal will be notified.

### **3.10 Child Helpline Services**

3.10.1 All Heads of school shall take reasonable measures to create awareness on the availability of a national toll free Child Helpline number (1325) to all children under their custody.

3.10.2 Child Helpline services may be used by students to report cases of child abuse, neglect, trauma and emotional stress.

## **4.0 DEFINITIONS**

### **4.1 Case by case basis**

Describes decisions which are made separately, each according to the facts of the particular situation

### **4.2 Counsellor**

A person trained to give guidance on personal, social, or psychological problems.

### **4.3 Counseling**

The provision of assistance and guidance in career selection, resolving personal, social, or psychological problems and difficulties by a professional to support the well-being and success of students..

### **4.4 Confidentiality**

Having confidence where there will be no disclosure of information by the Counsellor, teacher or Head of school

### **4.5 Ethical responsibility**

The duty to follow a morally correct path.

### **4.6 Head(s) of School**

Refers to Head teacher(s) and Principal(s)

### **4.7 Intervention**

The most suitable practical option undertaken to improve a child's behaviour.

**5.0 RELEVANT LEGISLATIONS AND POLICIES**

- 5.1 2013 Constitution of Fiji
- 5.2 PSC Act 1999 and Regulations
- 5.3 General Orders 2011
- 5.4 Education Act 1978
- 5.5 Child Welfare Decree -2010
- 5.6 Inter Agency Guidelines on Child Abuse and Neglect
- 5.7 Policy National Substance Abuse
- 5.8 Crimes Decree 2009
- 5.9 MoEHA Child Protection Policy
- 5.10 MoEHA Behavioral Management Policy
- 5.11 MoEHA OHS Policy
- 5.12 MoEHA Emergencies in Education Policy

6.0 EFFECTIVE DATE.....16/01/2017.....

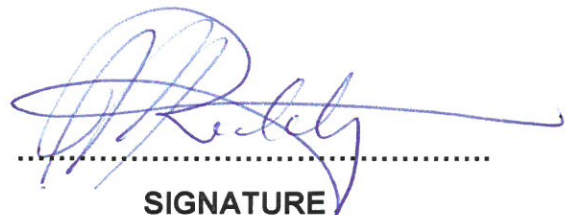
7.0 REVIEW DATE.....16/01/2020.....

**8.0 KEY SEARCH WORDS**

Counseling, Counsellor, confidential, child protection, student well-being

**9.0 APPROVED BY THE HONORABLE MINISTER FOR EDUCATION, HERITAGE & ARTS DR. MAHENDRA REDDY**

16/01/2017  
.....  
DATE

  
.....  
SIGNATURE



What interventions have you used? Were they successful? Why/why not
Current Performance in class?

## Appendix 2: Parent Referral Form

### **COUNSELLING: PARENT REFERRAL FORM**

Students Name:	Year:
Parents Name:	DOB:
Phone Number: `	Date of Referral:

Reasons for referral/ what concerns do you have? <i>Briefly describe concerns:</i>
Developmental history(e.g. has your child ever been seriously ill or had an accident) <i>Briefly describe illness or accident:</i>
Previous assessments( e.g. Doctor, Psychologist, Speech Therapist, Paediatrician) <i>Please describe any previous assessments and the outcomes of the assessment/s:</i>

Are there any recent events that may have had an impact on your child?(e.g. divorce, marital breakdown, death in the family, new school)

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I, \_\_\_\_\_ give the school Counsellor permission to carry out assessment and counselling as required. I authorize the exchange of information between the school and \_\_\_\_\_ (agency of prior counselling, if any).

Parent's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_