ST STITHIANS COLLEGE

POLICY: PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

(July 2017)

PREAMBLE

1. The purpose of this policy is to describe the role and services offered by psychological practitioners operating within their professional capacities, as employed by St Stithians College and in accordance with legislative provisions. It is noted that the practitioners' work is in line with their relevant scopes of practice as set out by the HPCSA and governed by relevant legislative provisions.
2. This policy excludes additional or routine interactions of practitioners with the College students and staff including, but not limited to, teaching of timetabled classes, involvement in school-related duties (e.g. such as tutor groups, grade teams, executive meetings or leadership committees), school events (e.g. trips and tours), and broader systemic functions (e.g. large group workshops requested by the school).

DEFINITIONS

3. For the purposes of this policy, any word or expression to which a meaning has been assigned in the Psychological Services Policy of St Stithians College shall have the meaning so assigned and, unless the context otherwise indicates:

    3.1 "Client(s)". Although St Stithians College works from a systemic perspective, the student(s) and staff are in all cases the primary clients.

    3.2 "Parent(s)" means both the natural and/or legal guardian(s) of the student(s).

    3.3 "Practitioners" means staff members of St Stithians College who are registered with the Board of Psychology under the HPCSA.

    3.4 "Extended Services" means services provided within the practitioner's scope of practice that fall outside their hours and responsibilities, as set out by the respective school within the College. These services also include private work provided to clients from other schools within the College.

    3.5 "HPCSA" means the Health Professions Council of South Africa.

    3.6 "School" means any of the five separate schools that fall under St Stithians College including: the Junior Preparatory School, the Girls' Preparatory School, the Boys' Preparatory School, the Girls' College and the Boys' College.

LEGAL AND ETHICAL GOVERNANCE

4. It is noted that the school and those in its employ are governed by relevant legislature, including (but not limited to) the Constitution of South Africa, the Children's Act, the School's Act, and the Protection of Personal Information Act.
5. For practitioners registered with the HPCSA, however, the Health Professions Act and the HPCSA's relevant rules and policies pertaining to the ethical conduct of professionals take precedence over all other legislature, with the exception of the Constitution.
6. and counsellors are accountable in their personal, professional capacity to the HPCSA as their regulatory board of professional governance, not the school, and will be guided by HPCSA regulations first and foremost in all aspects of their roles and responsibilities within the school.
7. Practitioners are expected to maintain their continuous professional development (CPD) and professional competency as per the HPCSA requirements in this regard.
8. Professional indemnity insurance is required by practitioners to provide cover for any legal costs and expenses relating to potential claims against them or the school.

REFERRALS AND CONSENT

9. Clients may be referred by parents, the school, or can self-refer for services offered by the practitioners.
10. Psychological services for clients under the age of 14 may not be provided without parental knowledge and/or informed consent. Both the client and parent/guardian(s) are required to give informed consent when a child under the age of 14 enters counselling, therapy or psychological assessments. Clients over the age of 14 may consent in their personal capacity and do not require the consent of parents/guardians for services; however, practitioners undertake to seek parental consent as far as possible for all minors (under 18 years).
11. Upon referral, the practitioner may see a student(s) for initial containment and/or intake to determine the reasons for seeking services, but will endeavour to obtain parental informed consent where necessary, as soon as possible before providing ongoing services to a client.
12. Practitioners may reserve the right not to inform parents if they deem that the particular circumstances warrant this, and will continue to act within the HPCSA guidelines, according to the best interests of the child.
13. Practitioners will communicate possible reasons for referral for psychological services and the nature of services offered to stakeholders (staff, parents and students) within their school. It is not the responsibility of staff members to perform psychological services, and when in doubt, they should refer to the school psychologists.
14. It is noted that due to the nature of the practitioners' work and the critical element of trust in the therapeutic relationship, they are not to engage directly in disciplinary matters pertaining to students within the school context, nor should a referral to school- based practitioners form part of sanctions of disciplinary meetings. Exceptions may include situations in which the practitioner may be consulted for professional guidance on disciplinary matters, or when considered involvement in disciplinary matters is in the best interests of the client.

CONFIDENTIALITY

15. The College and practitioners will follow legislative provisions regarding confidentiality, and in particular, take note of the Children's Act, Health Professions Act and School's Act. In the Children's Act of 2005 it states that "in all matters concerning the care, protection and well-being of a child the standard that the child's best interest is of paramount importance, must be applied" (DSD, 2010, Chapter 2, Section 9). This is the spirit in which practitioners operate at St. Stithians College.

16. Legislative provisions require that the highest possible level of confidentiality is offered to the client in order to respect privacy and create the necessary trust.

17. In accordance with relevant legislature, limits on confidentiality and the disclosure of confidential information apply in the following exceptional circumstances:

    17.1 with the permission of a client;

    17.2 as mandated by law;

    17.3 when permitted by law for a valid purpose such as to provide needed

    17.4 professional services to a client;

    17.5 to obtain appropriate professional consultations;

    17.6 to protect a client or others from harm;

    17.7 to obtain payment for a psychological service, in which instance disclosure is limited to the minimum necessary to achieve that purpose;

    17.8 for the practitioner to obtain professional consultation and supervision, in which instance identifying information will be withheld to protect the client's privacy.

    17.9 When not doing so would mean a failure to protect the legitimate interests of the school, its staff and other students.

18. Practitioners are expected to clarify the nature of their relationships with various stakeholders and clients, and the impact of these on confidentiality. It is noted that the "client" may differ case by case.

    18.1 **School as the client (in the HPCSA ethical policy known as a 'third party' service provider):** It is noted that practitioners are employed by the school and therefore conduct their duties to fulfil a role within the school according to their job description. The practitioners are expected to work from a systemic perspective within the school system, as far as possible. This means that the practitioner has certain responsibilities towards the school and is required to act in accordance with the expectations in their contract of employment. This may mean that at times information on the nature of their interventions may be required by the school (e.g. in the form of trends in their referrals or common challenges faced by students). Practitioners should always clarify their role (e.g. therapist, consultant, assessor, etc.) and discuss limits of confidentiality which may apply in each case.

    18.2 **Student as the client:** It is understood that practitioners are employed primarily to offer support services to students at the College as their primary clients. Practitioners will safeguard the confidential information of clients and discuss any limits to confidentiality accordingly. Should communication take place between the legal guardian(s), staff members, the student and practitioner, it must always be remembered and made clear that the student, not the parent or school, is the primary client, and that the practitioner is thus obliged to maintain confidentiality. Should information about a client be requested

by a parent or the school, the practitioner should seek informed consent from the client before proceeding. This is to avoid the breakdown of trust in the client-practitioner relationship as it is understood that trust is an integral part of ensuring that students continue to seek psychological services within the school context.

18.3 **Family as the client:** In the event that family therapy is undertaken, the family is the client. Limits of confidentiality apply in much the same way as with individual clients.

Client's confidential files or any part thereof may not be shared with any staff members (including management staff) at the College. Relevant information on clients can be provided by the practitioner in accordance with ethical practice and limits of confidentiality.

LIAISON BETWEEN PRACTITIONERS AND OTHER ST STITHIANS COLLEGE STAFF

19. Practitioners are not permitted to disclose confidential information to staff without the consent of the client and/or parent(s), as set out in the rules of confidentiality above. However, this does not preclude practitioners from being consulted or involved in discussions about the most appropriate forms of support and response to clients' well- being or behavioural difficulties within the school by concerned staff members. Practitioners may be able to contribute valuably to these processes without disclosing confidential information.
20. In some instances, permission to release information can be obtained from the client/ parent(s), when requested or deemed necessary in relation to the best interests of the client.

RECORD KEEPING

21. The practitioner's case files are the property of the practitioner and are securely stored on the school property, in accordance with confidentiality ethics.
22. Practitioners should ensure that one other registered practitioner is able to access confidential files, in the event of the client's practitioner being indisposed.
23. When a practitioner leaves the employ of the College, their confidential case files should be adequately handed over to another registered practitioner, and securely stored.
24. Ex-practitioners of the College should be allowed access to their past client files, should circumstances require it.
25. Case files should be kept securely until the student turns 21, in accordance with legislative provisions. However, five years after the student has matriculated is the recommended period for archiving of records.
26. The client records do not in any manner form part of the official employee or student records of the College and are stored separately from the College's student profile files, as outlined in the Student Profile Policy.
27. Practitioners may send confidential documentation via the College email and store and update client records to the College network. The IT Department, who has access to said network, are aware of the sensitive nature of these files and the rules of confidentiality which apply to the practitioners. Confidential records should not be stored in public or shared electronic databases, such as on the College's student management system (Pencilbox) or in shared network drives (such as the Staff or Student drive).

28. Administrative staff involved with booking sessions and/or handling of any client information are required to sign a confidentiality agreement. They are further required to commit to responsible handling of distressed clients and/or crisis situations. These staff members are to receive training on the HPCSA's ethical guidelines for psychological services. They are to receive ongoing supervision and continuous professional development, to ensure that services rendered do not contravene legislature and ethical practice.

LEGAL WORK

29. The practitioners will not undertake to conduct any forensic work as employees of St Stithians College unless summonsed to give evidence as professional witnesses as mandated by law.

FEES

30. Requests and referrals from the practitioner's school within the College encompass the roles and responsibilities ("services") of the practitioners in the employ of the College and will be free of charge, unless otherwise specified by the particular school.
31. Should a client need to be referred for extended psychological services, they will be provided with a referral list with various appropriate professionals to contact. The list of contacts may include the client's school practitioner or other practitioners employed by the College, and a minimum of at least two alternative practitioners who are not employed by the College. Clients are to be encouraged to seek the "best fit" practitioner and style of practice so as to obtain optimal benefit from psychological services.
32. Practitioners are permitted to charge private rates for extended services to clients from their respective school and/or from other schools within the College, should said clients choose to enter into extended services with the practitioner as opposed to alternative practitioners, and as per their individually negotiated employment contracts.
33. Practitioners are to apply considered ethical guidelines whilst determining when to enter into extended services with clients from within the College, with due consideration given to potential conflict of interests given the nature of their employment, as well as the best interests of the client.
34. Private services rendered (and charged for) are not to take place within the agreed work hours of the practitioner stated in their contract of employment with the College, unless permission is obtained from the head for specific services.

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