



St. Louis Grammar School

Principal Mr Sean Rafferty B.Ed, M.Ed, PQH (NI)

Cullybackey Road
BALLYMENA
BT43 5DW

27th March 2020

Dear Parents/Guardians,

We have recently been informed that one of our counselling providers, Familyworks is able to offer the continuation of their Independent Counselling Service (ICSS) for schools via the medium of online or telephone during school closures.

This is a confidential service for all students between the ages of 11-18. Therefore, every year group in our school, even those who will leave school this year can use it. It happens on the same day and time as counselling is usually delivered in school (currently Wednesday and Thursday).

If your son/daughter is already receiving counselling, you don't need to do anything. This will continue via telephone or online. The school Counsellor will be in contact with them in a few days via their school email.

If your son/daughter would like to refer themselves into the ICSS this can be done through the Familyworks website. The address is www.familyworksni.com. You can also refer your son/daughter to the service but you should get their permission to do so first. You can do this by just asking them privately how they might feel about speaking to the school Counsellor. It can help to make sure that your son/daughter has a quiet space to talk to the Counsellor away from the rest of the family. There is a button on the website for parents and school staff to refer.

We have been assured that the service will be delivered to the same standard as in school and will work under the school's Child Protection Policy.

A telephone Drop-in will also be provided and the number and time for this will be on the school website.

Finally, if your son/daughter is already receiving help from CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service) that help should continue during this crisis so encourage them to engage with that help. If you are concerned that your son/daughter is thinking about self-harm or suicide please consult your GP or call the Lifeline number on 0808 808 8000.

We are pleased that our students can continue to access counselling during this period of school closure. We will continue to update you as pastoral services/support become available.

In the meantime, we hope that everyone in our school community will remain safe and well.

Yours faithfully

Mrs J. O'Neill
Vice-Principal



Parents, Carers & Teachers

Hello, my name is Edith Bell and I'm the Clinical Director here at Familyworks. I'm a parent and a grandparent, and I've been counselling young people since the 1990s.

While young people are tougher than we think, they can be frightened by something new and unpredictable like COVID-19. If we're honest, we're all a little stressed by it. It's a big change for everyone. School's out, exams are cancelled and there's loads of uncertainty around.

Young people will have lots of unspoken worries like, what will happen to my grades, my future, the people that I love – will I get sick, what about my grandparents, how will I manage being stuck indoors for ages. Be honest with them because they're only asking questions that you're thinking about too.

We should be honest about their questions and explain that sometimes we just don't know the answers but we do know that we have people who love us and will help us through. Don't lie to them but give them only as much information as they can handle and use simple language.

Take time to listen to what your children are saying about Coronavirus. Notice if they're anxious or very quiet. Don't bombard them with questions but sit down when they're ready, maybe over a snack, or sitting on the settee and just chat. My best family conversations often start like that. Answer what you can and be honest if you don't know the answer.

We'll be providing some more practical help over the next period of time with videos and tips on: How To Stay Calm, How To Feel Grounded And Relaxed, Mindful Breathing, Calming Techniques, How To Answer Tough Questions and a lot more. Check out our videos and more on our social media. You can find us at the following places:

Facebook – facebook.com/familyworksni
Instagram – instagram.com/familyworkscounselling
Twitter – twitter.com/familyworksni
Vimeo – vimeo.com/familyworksni

Watch out on Snapchat for our videos as well, which will all point young people in Northern Ireland to the ICSS Schools Counselling Service.

And remember you can do this because nobody cares for these kids more than you do.

Edith