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Counselling policy and service delivery

1. Context for provision of counselling

1.1 Criteria for client's access to counselling at WHY

The primary task of We Hear You is the provision of free counselling for anyone aged from four years upwards who is:

- Diagnosed with cancer or a life-threatening condition
- Affected by a cancer or a life-threatening diagnosis – family member, carer or friend
- Bereaved by cancer or a life-threatening condition

1.2 Donations

We Hear You aims to provide free counselling to all who need it. Clients are also asked to consider offering a donation for their counselling if they are a position to do so.

1.3 Counsellor's role

Counselling offers an opportunity for individuals affected by cancer or life-threatening conditions to talk and be heard in a safe, non-judgemental environment. The expression of fear and anxiety can benefit mental and physical wellbeing. The counsellor's role in this process is to aid the individual in ways that respect his/her values and capacity for self-determination. The counsellor will not give advice but will help the individual explore options. The practitioner's role in this process is to aid the individual in ways that respect his/her values and capacity for self-determination.

2 Client service provision and entitlement

2.1 Service locality

Counselling is available to anyone affected by cancer or a life-threatening condition in Bath and North East Somerset, Somerset, Swindon and Wiltshire.

2.2 Venues

WHY provides one-to-one counselling on a weekly basis for adults in Bath, Bradford-on-Avon, Chippenham, Devizes, Frome, Midsomer Norton, Street, Salisbury, Swindon, Trowbridge and Yeovil; community children and young people's counselling in Bath, Frome, Peasedown St John, Street, Yeovil and at The Hub, John of Gaunt school in Trowbridge; and school-based counselling for children and young people in Frome at Frome Community College and Selwood Academy, and at Matravers School in Westbury. A school support service offers counselling to any school within WHY's area, whereby a school may make a request for a child, whose family are not able to take their child to a community service and online counselling is not appropriate. Couples therapy is offered in Bath, Bradford-on-Avon, Chippenham, Frome and Yeovil. Creative therapy is also offered alongside one-to-one talking therapy. All venues and maps can be found on the WHY website 'Get Support' tab, 'Venues' tab.

WHY offers therapeutic group courses for people living with and beyond cancer and bereaved. These are WHYoutdoors, WHYbemindful and WHYgrow. WHYoutdoors runs for 6 weeks and takes place at Rainbow Woods National Trust, Bath, and other venues. WHYbemindful runs for 8 weeks and takes place either on Zoom or other venues, which will be on the website. WHYgrow takes place at Mells Walled Garden, monthly, for bereaved clients.

An online and telephone counselling service is offered by WHY, in addition to the face-to-face counselling, to those aged 12 and over. WHYwalkandtalk is a face-to-face service, for adults, which provides counselling in an outside setting.

A Polish counselling service, for adults, is offered in Frome and via online or telephone.

Men WeHearYou is an online counselling service being run in conjunction with the RUH Bath and Yeovil District Hospital.

WHY provides a supervision service at the Royal United Hospital Bath, Musgrove Hospital Taunton and We Get It.

There is a regular review of all WHY venues. Any concerns should be discussed with the clinical manager. In the event that a counsellor feels that a venue is unsafe then they should cease counselling immediately and inform the venue office manager and clinical manager. Counsellors may make minor adjustments within their venue, such as moving chairs to suit their need, provided it is safe for them to do so. Each venue will have a health and safety check every two years co-ordinated by the clinical coordinator.

2.3 Client expectations

Clients are entitled to expect a high quality therapeutic counselling service which:

- is client focussed
- is delivered by appropriately qualified counsellors

As an organisational member of BACP, We Hear You is bound by its Ethical Framework for good practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy and subject to professional conduct procedures for the time being in force. Counsellors are asked to read it at least annually and refer to it as necessary.

3. Professional practice

3.1 Counsellor qualifications

All counsellors are trained to diploma level and committed to maintaining their competence through ongoing professional development.

All counsellors are members of a professional body and are required to send up to date copies of proof of their professional membership to the Office Administrator to keep in their staff file.

We also offer student placements for counsellors nearing the end of their training. All clients will be carefully assessed for suitability to work with a 3rd year student and clients will be offered an option of waiting for a fully qualified counsellor if they prefer.

3.2 Disclosure and Barring Check

All counsellors and staff have undergone enhanced disclosure and barring checks. All counsellors attend regular safeguarding training.

3.3 Counsellors' supervision

Counsellors have regular supervision with an experienced qualified counsellor/psychotherapist who is experienced in delivering supervision and a member of a recognised professional organisation.

3.4 Counsellor standards

Counsellors will not misrepresent their training or experience.

4. Client confidentiality

4.1 Counselling agreement

The client confidentiality policy is contained in the counselling agreement, a copy of which is emailed to each client and discussed with the client at the first session. The counsellor is required to explain exceptions to confidentiality to each client verbally at the beginning of the first session.

4.2 BACP Ethical Framework

The BACP Ethical Framework requires that counsellors offer the highest possible levels of confidentiality in order to respect the client's privacy and create the trust necessary for counselling.

4.3 Exceptional circumstances

In exceptional circumstances, the counsellor may take the decision to break confidentiality, with or without the client's consent, if necessary, where in their professional judgement:

- there is a risk of significant harm to the client.
- there is a risk that a serious crime could be or could have been committed, e.g. terrorism.
- there is a risk of another person being significantly harmed.
- there are safeguarding issues.

In such circumstances the counsellor will always:

- Seek to obtain the clients', or if appropriate the parent/carer consent prior to disclosure where appropriate.
- Discuss with his/her supervisor.
- Inform the clinical manager or CEO of any breach of confidentiality.

An interagency approach is taken with children and this should be explained to parents.

4.4 Limitations of confidentiality

It is therefore ethically and legally unwise to promise 'total' or 'absolute' confidentiality. We Hear You offers confidentiality within the law, the BACP Ethical Framework and within WHY policy guidelines.

4.5 Storing client information

During counselling, counsellors must ensure that all client information is stored securely on the database. Paper forms are uploaded onto the database and then destroyed. Please see the data protection, retention and privacy policy v1.0. Once counselling has finished, counselling records and brief case notes are stored on the database for seven years. They will be kept securely, locked away and will be held for seven years. Counsellors are expected to NOT stay logged in on the database as it may not be secure. This includes not having the password saved automatically.

Counsellors are required to lock their computer screens whenever they leave them and not leave them open.

Any historic paper records will be kept by WHY for seven years and then destroyed. Any current paper records should be returned to the office at the end of a client's counselling. Paper referral forms for children or young people should be scanned onto the database and then destroyed. Any other paper notes should be destroyed securely and not kept within the counsellor's premises.

4.6 Guidelines for client emails

When sending any client information in emails counsellors and WHY staff should use initials or first name and initial of last name. Keep all information to the minimum in the email and refer person receiving the email to the database for further information if this is relevant.

5. Service delivery

5.1 Counselling setting

Counselling will be provided in an appropriate, safe and confidential environment.

5.2 Number of sessions

Clients can access a maximum of 16 counselling sessions. Clients are initially offered six sessions with a review as to continuing for further sessions. This will be agreed between the client and counsellor. Counselling sessions will last for up to 50 minutes and will normally be on a weekly basis, at the same time and day each week. Clients are able to re-access our service again, after a twelve-month period has passed, for a further block of 16 sessions. This may be reviewed in exceptional circumstances.

Clients are able to access further face to face counselling after a period of 12 months has passed, unless there has been a significant change in their circumstances and then they can re-refer sooner. Clients are able to refer for a maximum of three blocks of one-to-one counselling in a seven-year period. Clients are able to attend courses and other services in addition to this during that time.

5.3 Referral - who refers

Adult clients are expected to self-refer. Children and young people under 13 are to be referred by someone with parental responsibility. Young people over 13 are able to self-refer or can be referred by a parent/carer or school. Couples should refer together for couples counselling.

5.4 Referral process

At the initial point of referral, or once consent has been received the office admin team will arrange a telephone assessment appointment, for the client(s), or parent/carer of a child or young person, with a suitable practitioner.

5.5 Arrangement of first session

The first session appointments are arranged by the admin team, by telephone, and thereafter with the allocated counsellor. This is followed up with confirmation by post or email, of the time, date, location and counsellor name. The client will also receive the counselling agreement, location details and instructions specific to a particular location.

5.6 Alternatives to face-to-face counselling

Clients will be offered an online or telephone session as an alternative, provided the counsellor has the appropriate training and the premises are suitable.

5.7 Access to range of services

Clients can access more than one of the services at WHY. Clients can access the group courses, couples, and one-to-one counselling at WHY in succession. They can move from a group course to couples or one-to-one and vice versa but cannot attend more than one service at a time. Clients are entitled to attend each group course only once. Exceptions to this are WHYoutdoors seasonal days, WHYgrow and the Coffee Connection.

5.8 Client non-attendance

Clients who do not attend two consecutive sessions and who do not contact the counsellor or office to discuss their non-attendance will be advised that their counselling has come to an end at the present time. Clients can refer back to the counselling service in the future, if appropriate.

5.9 Signposting to other agencies

The counsellor will have access to a list of support agencies in the area, held by We Hear You.

6 Monitoring and evaluation

6.1 Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation - Outcome Measure (CORE)

CORE-OM (Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation - Outcome Measure) is a measure of psychological distress used in psychological therapies. We Hear You uses CORE evaluation for adults and YP CORE for young people aged 12 and above. Clients are either sent the information about CORE, before the first session, with a link for the client to complete and return the CORE form or given the information, by the counsellor, about CORE/ YP CORE at the start of counselling and asked if they are willing to complete an evaluation form and if they agree for the data to be used anonymously.

Clients are asked to complete the final CORE/YP CORE form at the last counselling session or may be sent it from the database prior to the last session. Adult clients CORE data is either recorded on the database by the counsellor, or sent directly to the clients from the database, for both individual and couples.

6.2 SDQ

We Hear You uses the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire for child clients. Parents/ carers and sometimes school staff are asked to complete these forms at the start and end of a child's counselling. Parents/ carers complete the forms at the initial and final parent/carer and counsellor meetings. Parents/carers are asked to attend an initial session prior to the child starting counselling and to a final session after the child's last session.

6.3 Evaluation

Evaluation is carried out via evaluation forms sent to clients and parents/carers, for children and young people, after their counselling has ended. Clients are informed by their counsellor that the evaluation form will be offered, but do not have to be filled out. Counsellors are asked to remind clients that they will receive forms after their counselling ends.

7. Insurance

Professional and Public Liability insurance is held to cover counsellors working at all of We Hear You venues. Self-employed counsellors are also expected to have their own Professional Public Liability insurance and a copy is held in their staff file.