



School Counselling Services Protocol

Context

St Patrick's College is a Catholic day and boarding school for boys in the Edmund Rice tradition, established in 1893. St Patrick's College is committed to providing a caring, supportive, and safe environment where every student has a place, a voice and their story is known. Edmund Rice Education Australia is committed to providing safe and supportive environments where all children and young people entrusted to our care are affirmed in their dignity and worth as a person.

Background

Edmund Rice Education Australia – Victorian Schools Limited (EREA VSL), as St Patrick's College's governing authority, sets the policy framework for all EREA VSL schools. This protocol has been contextualised for St Patrick's College's particular school environment so that our protocols reflect the needs of our students*.

*Student includes any person enrolled in the College, either as a day pupil or as a boarder.

Introduction

St Patrick's College recognises that student wellbeing is foundational to learning and development and therefore provides counselling services as a core component of its whole-school approach to wellbeing.

The College is committed to ensuring that counselling services are accessible, responsive, culturally safe, and delivered in a manner that prioritises the best interests, safety, and holistic development of each student.

Counselling services are delivered within a framework that ensures ethical practice, legal compliance, appropriate supervision, and continuous improvement.

When delivering counselling services, the College recognises that the duty of care owed to students is paramount and may require action that overrides confidentiality in order to prevent harm.

Purpose

The purpose of this protocol is to establish a clear framework for the provision of student counselling at the College to ensure that services:

- a. support the emotional, psychological, and social wellbeing of students
- b. are accessible and comply with legal and safeguarding requirements
- c. outline the roles and responsibilities of staff
- d. define procedures for accessing support

- e. affirm the College's commitment to fostering a supportive and inclusive school environment

Scope

This protocol applies to all enrolled students and staff involved in the delivery of counselling services, student wellbeing support, referral processes, and the collection, use, storage, and disclosure of personal and sensitive information within a counselling context. It applies to all counselling interactions conducted on school grounds, during school-related activities, or through any school-approved medium.

This protocol operates in conjunction with the College's broader child safety, wellbeing, privacy, and pastoral care approach and must be read in conjunction with relevant policies and procedures to ensure a coordinated and integrated approach to student wellbeing.

Guiding Principles of Student Counselling Services

Counselling services at the College operate within a clearly defined legal and ethical framework that requires staff to balance confidentiality with duty of care, child safety obligations, and privacy requirements.

The delivery of student counselling services within the College are guided by the following principles:

1. Student Wellbeing and Best Interests

Counselling services prioritise the safety, wellbeing, and holistic development of the student in decisions and actions.

2. Confidentiality and Trust

Counselling is conducted in a manner that respects student privacy and fosters trust, with clear communication regarding the limits of confidentiality, particularly in situations involving risk of harm.

3. Respect, Equity, and Inclusion

Services are provided in a non-judgmental, inclusive, and culturally responsive manner, respecting the diverse backgrounds, identities, and experiences of all students.

4. Accessibility and Early Intervention

Counselling services are accessible to all students and promote early identification and support for emotional, social, and behavioural concerns.

5. Professionalism and Ethical Practice

Counsellors adhere to established professional standards, maintain appropriate boundaries, and engage in ongoing professional development to ensure high-quality support.

6. Collaboration and Partnership

Counselling services work collaboratively with school staff, families, and external agencies, where appropriate, to support student wellbeing while maintaining confidentiality.

7. Safeguarding and Duty of Care

The College is committed to protecting students from harm. Appropriate action will be taken in accordance with legal and school requirements when there are concerns about a student's safety or the safety of others.

Roles and Responsibilities

The Principal is responsible for the implementation, oversight, and review of this protocol and for ensuring that counselling services operate in compliance with legal and regulatory requirements. Counselling staff are responsible for delivering services in accordance with this protocol, including obtaining consent, maintaining records, managing risk, and upholding professional standards. All staff share responsibility for supporting student wellbeing and identifying and referring students who may require support.

Nature and Scope of Counselling Services

Counselling services at the College provide structured, short-term, and evidence-informed support designed to assist students in addressing emotional, psychological, social, and behavioural challenges that may impact their wellbeing or engagement in learning.

Counselling interventions are typically goal-oriented and focused on early identification, early intervention, skill development, and the strengthening of resilience and coping strategies.

Counselling may address a wide range of issues, including but not limited to anxiety, stress, low mood, peer relationships, family changes, grief and loss, identity development, behavioural concerns, and school engagement.

Counselling is not designed to provide intensive, long-term, or specialised therapeutic treatment for complex mental health conditions. The College will facilitate referral to appropriately qualified external professionals where such needs are identified.

Access and Referral Processes

Students may access counselling services through self-referral, referral by a staff member, or referral by a parent or carer. All referrals must be processed through established pastoral care structures to ensure appropriate oversight, prioritisation, and coordination of support.

The College actively promotes help-seeking behaviour by ensuring that students are aware of counselling services and can access them in a manner that is safe, confidential, and responsive. At the same time, the College maintains structured referral pathways to ensure that student wellbeing is monitored and that a student at risk is not overlooked.

Where a student is identified as being at risk of harm, including risks associated with self-harm, suicidal ideation, abuse, neglect, or significant psychological distress, the referral must be treated as urgent and immediate assessment by counselling staff is required. In such circumstances, the student's safety takes precedence over all other considerations, including their willingness to engage in counselling.

Counsellors at the College operate as part of a multidisciplinary wellbeing team and collaborate with relevant staff to ensure coordinated, consistent, and informed responses to student needs.

Consent

Counselling services are provided at the College on the basis of informed, voluntary, specific, and ongoing consent. The College takes reasonable steps to ensure that consent is meaningfully obtained and appropriately documented.

Informed consent requires that students and, where applicable, their parents or carers are provided with clear, accessible, and age-appropriate information about the nature and purpose of counselling, the role of the counsellor, the types of information that will be collected, how that

information will be used and shared, and the limits of confidentiality.

Written consent is strongly preferred for all ongoing counselling engagements, as it provides clarity and accountability.

Verbal consent may be accepted in certain circumstances, provided that the details of the consent conversation, including what information was provided and understood, are clearly documented in the student's counselling record.

Students aged 16 years and over are generally presumed to have the capacity to consent to counselling, while students under 16 years of age require parental consent unless they are assessed as competent or mature minors.

A competent mature minor assessment involves a careful evaluation of the student's ability to understand the nature, purpose, risks, and benefits of counselling, as well as the implications of consent and confidentiality, and this assessment must be formally documented and approved by the Principal or delegate.

Consent is understood as an ongoing process rather than a one-time event. Counsellors at the College remain attentive to changes in the student's circumstances or presentation that may require renewed consent or further explanation.

In emergency or crisis situations, counselling support may be provided without prior consent where it is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent risk to the health, safety, or wellbeing of the student or others. In such cases, the reasons for proceeding without consent will be clearly documented, and parents or carers must be informed as soon as practicable unless doing so would place the student at increased risk.

Students retain the right to withdraw consent at any time. This decision is respected unless there are overriding safety and duty of care obligations that require continued intervention.

Parents/carers may withdraw consent for their child to participate in school-based counselling services at any time by contacting the relevant counselling team member and providing written notice to the school. Upon receipt of the withdrawal of consent, counselling sessions will cease, except where the school is required or reasonably considers it necessary to take action to protect the safety and wellbeing of the student or another person or comply with its legal obligations. The school will discuss any implications of the withdrawal with the parent/carer and, where appropriate, the student.

Confidentiality and Information Sharing

Confidentiality is a central component of effective counselling practice, as it supports trust, openness, and student engagement; however, within the College's context, confidentiality is inherently limited and will be clearly explained to students and parents as part of the consent process.

Information disclosed in counselling will generally be kept confidential; however, it will be disclosed where necessary to fulfil duty of care obligations, comply with legal requirements, or respond to risks to the safety or wellbeing of the student or others. Such circumstances include, but are not limited to, disclosures of abuse or neglect, self-harm or suicidal ideation, threats of harm to others, and involvement in serious criminal activity.

Information sharing at the College will be purposeful, proportionate, and limited to what is necessary to achieve the intended outcome and will occur on a need-to-know basis.

Counselling staff may share information within the College's wellbeing team to support coordinated care, and may also share information with parents, carers, or external professionals where this is necessary to support student wellbeing or to meet legal obligations.

The College participates in authorised information-sharing frameworks including mandatory reporting, the [Child Information Sharing Scheme](#), the [Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme](#) including the [Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management](#) (MARAM).

Wherever possible, students will be informed about how their information will be shared and the reasons for this.

Duty of Care and Safeguarding

The College has a non-delegable duty of care to take reasonable steps to protect students from foreseeable harm, and this duty underpins all counselling practices and decision-making processes. Where there is a conflict between confidentiality and safety, the obligation to protect the student from harm takes precedence.

Counselling staff at the College are responsible for identifying, assessing, and responding to risks in a timely and professional manner, and take all reasonable steps to ensure student safety, including supervision, escalation, and referral to the Principal, external authorities and agencies where required.

All safeguarding concerns are managed in accordance with the College's Child Safety policies, procedures and legal requirements, including mandatory reporting.

Counselling Processes and Practice

Counselling at the College begins with a clear explanation of the counsellor's role, the nature of the counselling relationship, the structure and purpose of sessions, and the management of information. This understanding will be confirmed and documented.

Counselling sessions will be conducted in environments that ensure both privacy and safety. Scheduling will take into account the students' educational commitments while ensuring timely access to support.

Counsellors will maintain appropriate professional boundaries at all times and ensure that all interactions with students occur within authorised school contexts and in accordance with professional and ethical standards.

Counselling Records

Counselling records at the College will be created and maintained in a manner that is accurate, objective, and sufficiently detailed to support continuity of care, accountability, and legal compliance.

Records will be stored securely, with appropriate physical and electronic safeguards, and access will be restricted to authorised personnel. At the same time, record-keeping practices will ensure that critical information is accessible where necessary to support student safety and fulfil the College's duty of care obligations.

Records will be retained in accordance with legal requirements and must not be altered or destroyed without proper authorisation.

Information Sharing with Parents and Staff

Parents and carers are recognised as key partners in supporting student wellbeing, and the College will generally involve and inform parents about counselling engagement where appropriate.

However, there may be circumstances where sharing information with parents is not in the best interests of the student, particularly where it may increase risk or compromise safety. In these circumstances, decisions will be carefully considered and documented.

Relevant information may be shared with staff to support student wellbeing and educational outcomes, provided that such sharing is proportionate, appropriate, and consistent with confidentiality and privacy obligations.

Professional Practice, Supervision and Accountability

Counselling staff at the College are appropriately qualified and adhere to the ethical standards of their profession, as well as to all relevant school policies and legal requirements.

Counsellors engage in ongoing professional supervision and learning to support reflective practice, maintain professional competence, and ensure accountability.

The College maintains oversight of the counselling services, including defined leadership responsibility, regular review of practice, and mechanisms for quality assurance and continuous improvement.

Managing Concerns, Complaints and Feedback

The College values feedback as a means of improving counselling services. Students and parents can raise concerns or complaints regarding counselling services through the [College Complaints Management Policy](#). The College will seek to incorporate student and parent perspectives into ongoing service development.

Case Closure and Continuity of Care

Counselling may conclude when the student's goals have been achieved, when the student chooses to discontinue, or when referral to external services is required.

Closure is conducted in a planned and supportive manner, including documentation of outcomes, communication with relevant parties, and arrangements for ongoing support where necessary.

The College counselling team work in collaboration with parents/carers and external providers to reasonably support the students' continuity of care.

Review

This protocol will be reviewed every two years unless there is a critical incident, legislative, regulatory or other requirement to do so earlier.

Supporting Documents and Related Policies

Supporting documents

- Child Information Sharing Scheme
- [Child Safe Standards](#)
- Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme
- [Ministerial Order 1359](#) – Implementing the Child Safe Standards – Managing the risk of child abuse in schools
- Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management (MARAM)
- [PROTECT – 4 Critical Actions to identify and respond to child abuse](#)

Related policies and documents

- [Pastoral Care Policy](#)
- [EREA VSL Privacy Policy](#)
- [EREA VSL Statement of Commitment to Child Safety](#)
- [Reportable Conduct Policy](#)
- [Students from Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Backgrounds](#)
- [LGBTQIA Inclusion](#)
- [Reporting and Responding Obligations](#)
- [Family and Community Involvement in Child Safeguarding Policy and Procedures](#)
- [Record Keeping Policy](#)
- [Complaints Management Policy](#)
- [Parent Code of Conduct](#)
- [Enrolment Policy](#)

Legislation

- Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) and Australian Privacy Principles
- Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)
- Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 (Vic)
- Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic)
- Education and Training Reform Act 2006 (Vic)
- Ministerial Order 1359 (Child Safe Standards)
- Crimes Act 1958 (Vic) (failure to disclose/protect offences)
- Family Violence Protection Act 2008 (Vic)
- Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) & Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS)
- Family Violence Multi-Agency Risk Assessment and Management Framework (MARAM)

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Student Counselling Informed Consent Form

Appendix 2 – Confidential Student Counselling Referral Form

Appendix 3 - Parent / Carer Informed Consent Form

Status of Policy

Protocol Governance	
Status	Approved
Version	1.0
Protocol Owner	Principal
Approving Authority	Principal
Approval Date	June 2026
Effective Date	June 2026
Risk Rating	High
Review By	June 2028
Publication	School Intranet – staff access
Document Type	School Protocol
Superseded Documents	New Protocol

Appendix 1

Student Counselling Informed Consent Form

This form is used to obtain informed consent for participation in counselling services at St Patrick's College. The purpose of this form is to ensure that students and parents or carers understand the nature of counselling, including its benefits, limitations, and the way information will be managed.

Students can access the counselling consent form online through their SIMON profile. To complete the form, students need to log in to SIMON, scroll down to the Co-Curricular tab, and open the *Student Counselling Consent Form*. Once completed and submitted, the consent will be recorded by the College.

Student Details

Student Name:			
Date of Birth			
Year Level		Homeroom	

Counselling Service Information

Counselling services at the College provide short-term, school-based support to assist students in managing emotional, social, behavioural, and wellbeing concerns.

Counselling is intended to support student development and engagement in learning; however, it is not a substitute for specialised or long-term psychological or psychiatric treatment. Where such needs are identified, referral to external professionals may be recommended.

Nature of Counselling

Counselling may involve structured conversations, development of coping strategies, goal setting, and support in managing personal challenges.

Sessions are typically conducted during school hours in a safe and private setting and may involve collaboration with relevant staff where appropriate to support student wellbeing.

Confidentiality

Information disclosed during counselling will be treated confidentially, however, confidentiality is not absolute. Information may be disclosed without consent where there is a risk of harm to the student or others, where there are concerns relating to abuse or neglect requiring mandatory reporting, where disclosure is required by law, or where information sharing is authorised under the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) or Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS).

Information Collection and Use

Personal and health information will be collected for the purpose of providing counselling support and promoting student wellbeing. This information will be stored securely and may be shared on a need-to-know basis in accordance with legal obligations and the College's child safety and duty of care responsibilities.

Consent

By signing this form, the student and/or parent or carer acknowledges that they have been

provided with clear information about counselling services and agree to participation under the conditions outlined.

- ☐ I consent to participation in counselling services.
- ☐ I understand the nature and purpose of counselling.
- ☐ I understand the limits of confidentiality and circumstances where information may be shared.

Parent/Carer Consent (if required)

I confirm that I have read and understood the information provided and give consent for my child to participate in counselling.

Parent/Carer Name	
Signature	
Date	

Student Consent (if applicable)

I confirm that I understand the counselling process and agree to participate voluntarily.

Student's Name	
Signature	
Date	

Competent Minor Assessment (if applicable)

Where a student under the age of 16 is assessed as capable of providing informed consent, this assessment must be documented.

- ☐ The student has been assessed as a competent minor.
- ☐ The assessment has been reviewed and approved by the Principal or delegate.

Staff member's Name	
Signature	
Date	

Appendix 2

Confidential Student Counselling Referral Form

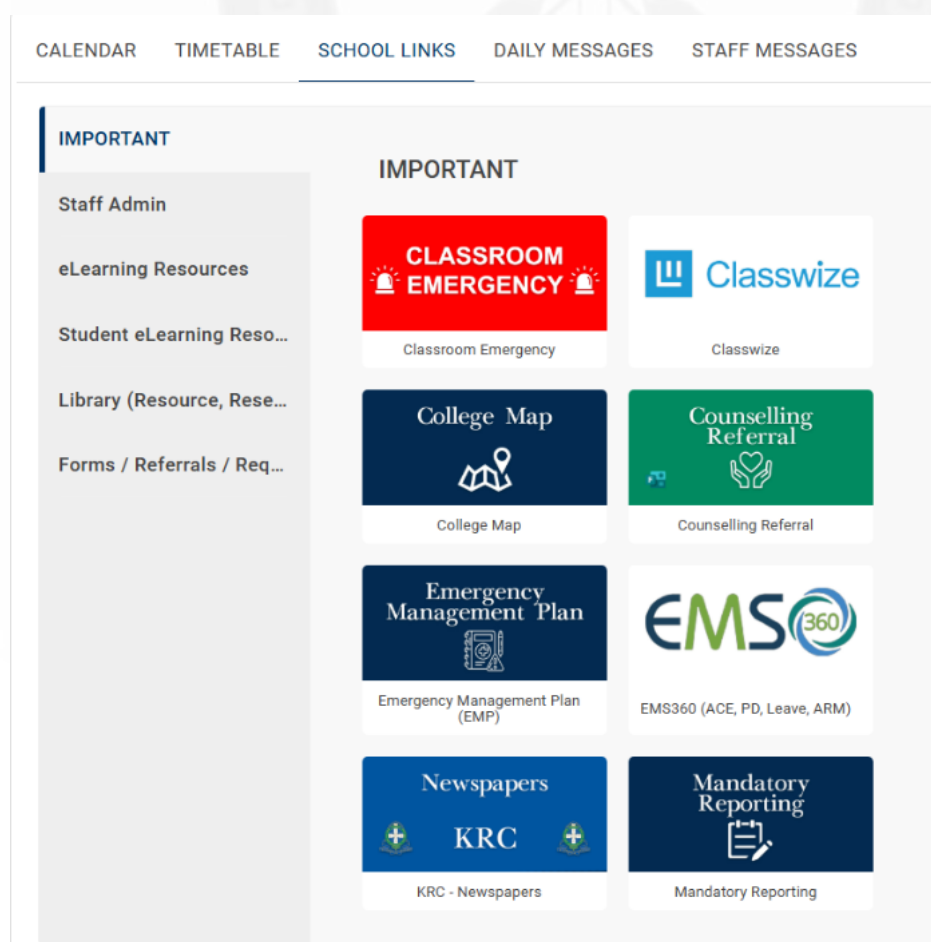
Any staff member at St Patrick's College may complete a Counselling Referral Form if they believe a student is in need of, or could benefit from, counselling support. This may arise through:

- Conversations with a student
- Information shared by another staff member
- Discussions with a parent/guardian or family member
- Observations of a student's wellbeing, behaviour, or emotional state

Process for Completing a Counselling Referral

1. Log into SIMON and access the homepage.
2. Navigate to the **IMPORTANT** tab.
3. Click on the **Counselling Referral** link.
4. Complete the referral form by providing all relevant details and information requested.
Please ensure the information provided is clear, accurate, and includes any relevant context that may assist the Counselling Team in supporting the student.
5. Submit the form.

Once submitted, the referral will automatically be sent to the Counselling Team for review and follow-up as appropriate.



St Patrick's College – Wellbeing Referral

St Patrick's College offers a range of services for students experiencing social, emotional and behavioural difficulties. Wellbeing assistance and supports are offered to all students at the College.

Student wellbeing is supported within a broad and holistic team and is the responsibility of all staff.

Please complete the form below with as much relevant information as possible to ensure accurate and timely intervention.

When you submit this form, the owner will see your name and email address.

Required Information

1. **Student Name**
2. **Year Level/ Homeroom**
3. **Referrer's Name and Position**

Child Safeguarding Screener

St Patrick's College holds the safety and wellbeing of students as its highest priority. Please answer the following questions and take associated actions if required.

Has the student disclosed engaging in self-harm/ suicidal ideation?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Is the student currently under the influence of drugs/ alcohol?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Has the student disclosed any concerns of abuse/ neglect?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Have you formed a reasonable belief that the student is experiencing abuse/ neglect?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Do you have any other concerns relating to the safety of the student?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Reason for Referral

Referrer Concerns

Please detail your observations/ reasons for referral.

Is the student aware of this referral?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Student Concerns

Please detail student observations/ concerns. If NO to above questions, please clarify why.

Is the parent / guardian aware of this referral?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

Parent / Guardian Concerns

Please detail parent observations/ concerns. If NO to above questions, please clarify why.

Appendix 3

Parent Counselling Informed Consent Form

Accessing the Parent / Guardian Counselling Consent Form

Parents and guardians can access the Counselling Consent Form through their **PAM account**.

Process for Completing the Consent Form

1. Log into your PAM account using your parent/guardian login details.
2. Navigate to the relevant student profile if you have more than one child enrolled at St Patrick's College.
3. Open the Counselling Consent notification or form listed within PAM.
4. Read the information provided regarding the College counselling service, confidentiality, and consent requirements.
5. Complete and approve the consent form by selecting the required consent options and submitting the form electronically.

Once submitted, the consent form will be received by the relevant wellbeing and counselling staff for processing and follow-up where required.

This form is used to obtain informed consent from a parent or guardian for a student's participation in counselling services at St Patrick's College. The purpose of this form is to ensure that parents or guardians understand the nature of counselling, including its benefits, limitations, and the way information will be managed.

Student Details

Student Name:			
Date of Birth			
Year Level		Homeroom	

Parent Details

Parent / Guardian Name:	
Contact Number:	
Email Address:	

Counselling Service Information

Counselling services at the College provide short-term, school-based support to assist students in managing emotional, social, behavioural, and wellbeing concerns.

Counselling is intended to support student development and engagement in learning; however, it is not a substitute for specialised or long-term psychological or psychiatric treatment. Where such needs are identified, referral to external professionals may be recommended.

Nature of Counselling

Counselling may involve structured conversations, development of coping strategies, goal setting, and support in managing personal challenges.

Sessions are typically conducted during school hours in a safe and private setting and may involve collaboration with relevant staff where appropriate to support student wellbeing.

Confidentiality

Information disclosed during counselling will be treated confidentially, however, confidentiality is not absolute. Information may be disclosed without consent where there is a risk of harm to the student or others, where there are concerns relating to abuse or neglect requiring mandatory reporting, where disclosure is required by law, or where information sharing is authorised under the Child Information Sharing Scheme (CISS) or Family Violence Information Sharing Scheme (FVISS).

Information Collection and Use

Personal and health information will be collected for the purpose of providing counselling support and promoting student wellbeing. This information will be stored securely and may be shared on a need-to-know basis in accordance with legal obligations and the College's child safety and duty of care responsibilities.

Consent

By signing this form, the parent or guardian acknowledges that they have been provided with clear information about counselling services and consent to their child's participation under the conditions outlined.

- ☐ I consent to my child participation in counselling services.
- ☐ I understand the nature and purpose of counselling.
- ☐ I understand the limits of confidentiality and circumstances where information may be shared.
- ☐ I understand that I can withdraw consent for my child to participate in school-based counselling services at any time by contacting the relevant counselling team member and providing written notice to the school. Upon receipt of the withdrawal of consent, counselling sessions will cease, except where the school is required or reasonably considers it necessary to take action to protect the safety and wellbeing of the student or another person, or comply with its legal obligations. The school will discuss any implications of the withdrawal with me and, where appropriate, the student.

Parent/Carer Consent (if required)

I confirm that I have read and understood the information provided and give consent for my child to participate in counselling.

Parent/Carer Name	
Signature	
Date	