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COMPETENCIES FOR COUNSELLING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Guidelines for Training Organisations, Practitioners and Trainees

Introduction

This guidance, endorsed by COSCA's Counselling Children and Young People Work Group and COSCA's Policy Board, provides information on the competencies expected by COSCA (Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland) of counsellors and psychotherapists working with children and young people.

The competencies listed in this guidance are offered to training organisations, practitioners and trainees to enable them to know and understand what is involved in counselling children and young people competently. Underpinning this guidance is the following description of the counselling task:

“Counselling is a contractually agreed relationship that is voluntarily entered into by both the client and an appropriately trained and supervised counsellor. It is offered within clearly defined parameters and underpinned by a professional code of ethics and practice for counsellors.

Counselling and psychotherapy can assist children and young people to address and overcome developmental challenges, psychological obstacles and traumatic life experiences. They can promote self-belief, enhance self-insight and build resilience. They offer a client-centred therapeutic dialogue within a non-judgemental relationship where the well-being of the young person is paramount and his/her agenda is central.”

COSCA (Counselling & Psychotherapy in Scotland) 2004

Further guidance on establishing and delivering counselling and psychotherapy services to children and young people can be found in COSCA's publication: Establishing Counselling Services for Children and Young People: COSCA Guidance on Good Practice and the Law in Scotland.

Organisations delivering training courses in counselling children and young people are encouraged to apply for COSCA Course Validation using our specialist application form and guidelines. For further information please see COSCA's website under validation/specialist courses. www.cosca.org.uk

PART I: PRINCIPLES AND OVERALL AIMS

1. Principles

Training in counselling with children and young people should enable any trained practitioner, in any orientation, to undertake counselling with a child or young person competently. All trainings should be consistent with COSCA standards and guidelines, including the competencies outlined within this document.

2. Overall aims

- 2.1 Counselling with children and young people differs from that with adults in certain respects. Training organisations must have a separate set of guidelines, a specific curriculum to meet the different needs of these client groups and training must be subjected to separate assessment by the training or accrediting organisation.
- 2.2 The intention of these guidelines is to create a framework for trainings that is flexible and can encompass the different orientations within counselling, whilst providing a sound basis for good practice. In all cases, the trainee will be expected to demonstrate sufficient understanding of human development and of the nature of counselling with children and young people; to be able to locate this within the wider context of working with children and young people within different sectors and disciplines; and to be able to practice counselling with children and young people in an appropriate range of settings and contexts.
- 2.3 The trainee should acquire a sound understanding of the particular dynamics and practical issues involved in therapeutic work with children and young people in different settings, and the associated ethical and legal issues.
- 2.4 The onus is upon the Training Organisation to demonstrate the means by which the curriculum and assessment of trainees will achieve learning outcomes to match these aims, including any unique characteristics of a particular orientation. These guidelines are intended to apply to full trainings in counselling with children and young people, but will also have application to shorter courses intended to build on prior trainings eg in working with adults or in other professional areas.
- 2.5 Training Organisations should also have specific Ethical Guidelines and Codes of Practice relating to counselling with children and young people to which all those accredited on the basis of these trainings will be expected to adhere. All training organisations will be expected to adhere to the codes of practices and ethics set out by COSCA.

3. Principles for Trainings in Counselling with Children and Young People:

These principles recognise:

- 3.1 the child or young person's individual human rights, including the right to self-determination, within the reasonable constraints of their needs for safety, protection and care. These should take into account the law relating to child protection, guidelines for vulnerable and young people and the rights of parents and carers
- 3.2 the child or young person's resilience, given the right support and conditions
- 3.3 the importance of considering the experience of children and young people in the overall context of their lives (section 5).
- 3.4 the right of the child or young person to respond to the circumstances of their lives as best they can, even where this manifests in ways that present challenge and difficulty in the adult world

- 3.5 the particular dependency and vulnerability of the child or young person, emotionally, physically, psychologically and spiritually
- 3.6 the child or young person's position in relation to the world, and the effects of family, social, cultural, religious/spiritual and political systems which frame the reality of their lives
- 3.7 the need to support children and young people in developing the skills and resources to deal realistically with the circumstances of their lives, as well as to fulfil their potential and build trust
- 3.8 the importance of interdisciplinary dialogue and exploration

PART II: Generic Learning Outcomes for Trainings in Counselling with Children and Young People

4. Knowledge and Understanding

The trainee will be expected to be able to:

- 4.1 demonstrate a sound knowledge of the developmental stages of infancy, childhood and adolescence and the different needs and experiences of children and young people at particular stages in their development.
- 4.2 demonstrate a good understanding of the psychological and relational tasks of human development
- 4.3 demonstrate an understanding of the theory and skills of counselling with children and young people, within the orientation they are studying, against an overall historical and critical perspective on the development of therapeutic work with children
- 4.4 have an understanding of the principles of adult counselling, and how this affects work with young people who may be on the brink of adulthood, or the adults who form part of the child's world, including the counsellor her or himself
- 4.5 demonstrate the ability to use resources for learning
- 4.6 recognise serious mental illness in children and young people, and in adults, as this impinges on children's lives
- 4.7 formulate an understanding of assessment, confidentiality and therapeutic intervention as it relates to the orientation within which the student is training
- 4.8 develop an awareness of the range and continuum of special educational needs and how these may present specific challenges to the counsellor in establishing an effective therapeutic relationship (section 6)
- 4.9 be able to identify and consult with appropriate professionals who can assist in the assessment of suitability of certain therapeutic practices for children with specific needs or disabilities; be aware of the potential limitations of her or himself in relation to work with children manifesting specific disabilities or special educational needs (section 6)
- 4.10 demonstrate a general level of understanding of other major models and approaches to therapeutic work with children and young people.
- 4.11 demonstrate an understanding of the effects of psychological trauma, neglect, sexual and physical and emotional abuse and how these manifest themselves
- 4.12 develop an ability to understand and evaluate research methods relevant to all models of counselling with children and young people, and critiques of evidence-based research
- 4.13 be aware of the importance of keeping up to date with therapeutic techniques with children, parents and families (section 9)

- 4.14 demonstrate an understanding of family and cultural dynamics (section 7)
- 4.15 demonstrate an understanding of the role and involvement of education, social services, health services and other public service sectors, the implications of these for therapeutic work and the role of inter-disciplinary working in different contexts (section 13)
- 4.16 demonstrate a sound knowledge of Child Protection procedures and guidance, the legislative framework relating to children, the ethical issues involved relating to safety and well-being of the child or young person, and to boundary issues and confidentiality
- 4.17 develop a practical knowledge of special procedures in the settings within which the work is undertaken (eg statementing for special needs)
- 4.18 demonstrate an awareness of the issues relating to the use of medicines in the mental health treatment of children (eg where there is a diagnosis of ADHD)

5. The Child or Young Person in Context

The trainee will be expected to be able to:

- 5.1 develop an understanding of how children function in the various contexts of their lives
- 5.2 demonstrate an understanding of family dynamics and other interactions which impinge upon the child.
- 5.3 demonstrate a knowledge of specific skills and approaches related to working with children of particular age-groups, or special characteristics which will form the core of his or her practice
- 5.4 be able to work constructively with parents, carers and other relevant adults for the good of the child or young person
- 5.5 demonstrate understanding of the particular power dynamics and relational issues involved in working with children and young people, including an appreciation of issues relating to transference and counter-transference (or alternative formulations corresponding to different orientations)
- 5.6 demonstrate a capacity to analyse the impact of the role and involvement of other agencies or individuals, and the implications of this in particular settings
- 5.7 demonstrate an awareness of, and sensitivity to, prejudice; show an ability to respond openly and appropriately to issues of race, gender, age, sexual preference, class, disability, and ethnic, spiritual/religious and cultural difference (section 7).
- 5.8 show a willingness to acknowledge the limitations of his or her own knowledge and experience, and to retain flexibility and creativity in formulating interventions or responses

6. Mental ill health and physical ill health

The trainee will be expected to be able to:

- 6.1 promote the health of children and young people, where appropriate
- 6.2 identify and support those children and young people experiencing, or at risk of mental health problems
- 6.3 understand the impact of stress on children or young people and those around them
- 6.4 work with children and young people who have physical as well as emotional or psychological problems
- 6.5 work collaboratively with other health professionals

7. Diversity

The trainee will be expected to be able to:

- 7.1 demonstrate a thorough understanding of the issues of diversity and equal opportunities
- 7.2 understand the impact of cultural context on the child or young person, and the impact of the counsellor from a different cultural context

8. Therapeutic skills

The trainee will be expected to be able to:

- 8.1 assess clients for suitability for their chosen orientation/approach, and justify the decision to offer to undertake counselling with a child or young person
- 8.2 identify indications of deeper disturbance or areas of specialist need that cannot be addressed within the orientation being practised or in the setting in which the work is being offered
- 8.3 negotiate appropriate contracts and boundaries with all parties concerned
- 8.4 establish and work with a therapeutic relationship congruent with the chosen orientation and the level of intensity of the work being offered
- 8.5 demonstrate specific skills relating to working with children of particular age-groups or special characteristics, needs or disabilities which will form the core of the counsellor's practice
- 8.6 demonstrate skills in communicating and establishing relationships with children at a range of age-levels, working with parents and children, with families, or with other parties involved, as appropriate to the settings for the work (section 13)
- 8.7 understand the child's need to be able to express feelings, thoughts and beliefs in the context of a safe and secure environment
- 8.8 establish and maintain a therapeutic alliance, manage change and appropriate endings, including breaks and holidays
- 8.9 develop a capacity for reflecting on one's own process in relation to working with children, through an appropriate combination of personal enquiry, experiential work and supervision
- 8.10 engage in appropriate placements within the specific training curriculum

9. Continuous Professional Development

The trainee will be expected to be able to:

- 9.1 critically reflect on therapeutic process and on his or her own practice.
- 9.2 have a realistic appreciation of the value and limits of the chosen therapeutic approach, of the counsellor's own capabilities and to be able to refer to other resources as required.
- 9.3 explore the political and social context of counselling
- 9.4 demonstrate continuing professional development

10. Use of Supervision

The trainee will be expected to be able to:

- 10.1 demonstrate regular on-going supervision, and to appreciate the particular supervisory requirements for therapeutic work with children
- 10.2 prepare for and make effective use of supervision appropriate to the context, specialisation offered and the work being undertaken, with a supervisor who has greater experience of therapeutic work with children or extensive relevant skills and a background of relevant experience with children
- 10.3 identify, clarify, assess and manage resolution of most therapeutic problems with support from supervision.

11. Communication and Presentation

The trainee will be expected to be able to:

- 11.1 engage confidently and respectfully in appropriately professional communication with others involved in the life of the child or young person
- 11.2 present their work for discussion and mutual learning in the context of others who are also undertaking therapeutic work with children

12. Working with others

The trainee will be expected to be able to:

- 12.1 negotiate and handle conflict confidently and respectfully, whether with children and young people, parents, teachers and/or other professionals
- 12.2 work co-operatively with others within the reasonable boundaries of the agreed therapeutic contract
- 12.3 work effectively with counselling groups and/or with other counsellors or other professionals
- 12.4 handle consultations with family members or other interested parties
- 12.5 to have a realistic appreciation of the value and limits of the chosen therapeutic approach, and of appropriate indicators for referral

13. Professional setting and Management skills

The trainee will be expected to be able to demonstrate:

- 13.1 awareness of the setting in which therapeutic work with children and young people takes place, and of the need to hold boundaries against challenge (e.g. confidentiality, privacy, lack of disruption, dedicated space and time-tabling)
- 13.2 for those trainees who are likely to be working within or closely with the education system, an understanding of the specific social contexts of the primary, secondary and special schools; of the challenges that teachers and support workers face; and the importance of the counsellor establishing good liaison and working relationships in the interest of appropriate referral, attendance at sessions and confidentiality.
- 13.3 ability to adapt the approach as necessary for the good of the child or young person
- 13.4 awareness of the need to assess what might not be possible in a particular professional setting
- 13.5 awareness of boundary issues, including confidentiality, in specific settings and in relation to the particular obligations relating to counselling with children and young people
- 13.6 a capacity to handle complex and unpredictable situations as they arise

- 13.7 an ability to understand and agree contracts between the child or young person, the school/parents and/or other professionals
- 13.8 an ability to manage the dynamics and role relationships within different organisational settings,
- 13.9 an understanding of professional relationships within and between professional teams and in multi-disciplinary settings where appropriate
- 13.10 an understanding of systems of referral (policies, criteria and processes and motivation for referral) in different settings and an ability to take responsibility within this area
- 13.11 an ability to promote the counselling service, manage the counselling service and make contracts if necessary
- 13.12 the capacity to undertake routine evaluation of counselling

14. Responsibility

The trainee is expected to be able to demonstrate:

- 14.1 autonomy in professional practice
- 14.2 responsibility for self-monitoring including the appropriate use of supervision (section 10)
- 14.3 awareness of particular issues and procedures relevant to the professional practice of counselling with children and young people

15. Ethics

The trainee should be able to formulate the general ethical principles and value base for working with children and young people within their chosen orientation, and to show how this relates to the overall principles formulated within the COSCA Principles outlined above. They should be able to demonstrate the practical application of these principles through their adherence to the specific ethical guidelines and codes of practice of their particular training organisation and orientation.

The trainee will be expected to be able to demonstrate:

- 15.1 awareness of the ethical, professional and practice responsibilities of being a counsellor working with children and young people
- 15.2 awareness of and ability to manage the implications of the particular ethical issues and dilemmas relating to work with children and young people in the particular contexts within which the work is being undertaken (section 13)
- 15.3 a recognition of the child or young person's right to confidentiality and self-determination in the context of the complementary right of care and protection, and the parental right in relation to decisions about their child
- 15.4 an awareness of the ethical issues and multi-disciplinary implications of the use of medicines in relation to the mental health treatment of children and young people (section 6)
- 15.5 a sound knowledge of legal issues relating to counselling with children or young people, and of other issues relating to the safety, wellbeing and protection of the child or young person.
- 15.6 an ability to work effectively with others to formulate potential solutions
- 15.7 an ability to predict and manage consequences of applied solutions

16 Evaluation

The trainee will be expected to be able to:

- 16.1 use critical reflection and undertake ongoing supervision with a suitable supervisor to assess and report on their own and others' work with the child or young person (section 10)
- 16.2 evaluate the chosen model of counselling, and compare it with alternative approaches, drawing on evaluative and evidence-based research and clinical experience
- 16.3 critically evaluate the implications of issues of culture, religion, race, gender, sexual orientation and disability in counselling.

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