Position Statement: Role of the International School Counselor During School Closures

For schools and counseling departments that are still developing their online learning program, in response to school closures forced by the Novel Coronavirus (Covid-19), and who are considering how to define the Role of the Counselor in this new format, please read recommendations from ISCA below. For schools that have developed and currently have an expectation in place for the role of the counselor, we offer this information as an update to best practices for counselors and their role in an online learning environment.

What does "Counseling" look like for a School Counselor?

Counseling* is the professional assistance and support provided to a student or small group of students during times of transition, heightened stress, critical change or other situations impeding student success. It is short term in nature and based on counseling theories and techniques that are effective in a school setting to support a student's development.

Counseling should be proactive as well as responsive and helps students identify problems, causes, potential consequences and benefits, alternatives and outcomes so they can make decisions and take appropriate actions.

Counseling is used to support students during and after a crisis. When students require long-term counseling to address mental health issues or to provide long-term support after a crisis, school counselors collaborate with families and other professionals to make referrals to appropriate community resources. Internationally, we know that not all communities have access to resources, in this case please refer to our list of Virtual Online Counseling Centers that can support your community: Online Counseling.

Traditional school counseling services may also include consultation and collaboration with others including parents, teachers, and school administrators. These services run the gamut and can range from assisting parents as they search for support for their child to helping college-bound students understand how to sign up for the SATs or ACTs in an alternate location.

School counselors do not provide therapy or long-term counseling in schools to address psychological disorders.

What does School Counseling look like during school closures?

In the case of school closures, school counselors should make every effort to provide continuity of services across all domains of school counseling, direct and indirect, including the following: Core Counseling Curriculum, Individual Counseling, Responsive Services and Program Management/System Support.

Examples of ways this can be done:
- *Counseling:* Provide brief online counseling for students in need.
- *Counseling:* Serve as liaison for communication with students/families in crisis.
- *Curriculum:* Maintain, deliver, and/or share developmentally appropriate, social-emotional lessons on topics such as:
  - Self-regulation
  - Anxiety
  - Wellness strategies
  - Self-confidence in ability to succeed
  - Manage transitions and adapt to changing situations and responsibilities
  - Effective coping and personal safety skills

(Schools may consider programs such as GoZen to support these efforts.)

- *Curriculum/System Support:* Offer Online Parenting Workshops/Presentations.
- *Program Management/System Support:* Collaborate with teachers, administrators and parents to develop a system for making referrals and clearly communicate how to access school counseling services and academic support. Your community should know that your counseling services are still happening, albeit in a different format.
- *Responsive:* Communicate with faculty and students about procedures if they are worried about any inappropriate behavior they witness in an online platform.
- *Responsive:* Participate on the Crisis Response team working alongside administrators and teachers to ensure student safety and wellbeing are at the forefront of all decisions.

Bearing in mind that this new online format is complex, and the short lead time given to transfer your program to this platform, expectations of yourself and your program should be commensurate with the situation.

What are the ethics around running a "Virtual School Counseling Program"?

As a reminder, at ISCA, we adopted the American School Counselor Association's Ethical Standards for School Counselors (Code of Ethics). These standards are the tenets of professional responsibility and serve as a guide for the ethical practices of school counselors, provide support and direction, and inform all stakeholders of our values and responsibilities. Topics covered include Confidentiality, Serious and Foreseeable Harm to Self and Others, etc.

We have highlighted some relevant guidelines, as a reminder, here below:

A. Responsibility to Students

A.1.b. School counselors aim to provide counseling to students in a brief context and support students and families/guardians in obtaining outside services if the student needs long-term clinical counseling.

A.2.j. Protect the confidentiality of students' records and release personal data in accordance with prescribed federal and state laws and school board policies.^

A.2.k. School counselors recognize the vulnerability of confidentiality in electronic communications and only transmit student information electronically in a way that follows currently accepted security standards and meets federal, state and local laws and board policy.^

A.2.o. Avoid using software programs without the technological capabilities to protect student information based upon currently acceptable security standards and the law.^

A.5.d. Do not use personal social media, personal email accounts or personal texts to interact with students unless specifically encouraged and sanctioned by the school district. School counselors adhere to professional boundaries and legal, ethical and school district guidelines when using technology with students, parents/guardians or school staff. The technology utilized, including, but not limited to, social networking sites or apps, should be endorsed by the school district and used for professional communication and the distribution of vital information.^

A.15. Virtual/Distance School Counseling

School counselors:

a. Adhere to the same ethical guidelines in a virtual/distance setting as school counselors in face-to-face settings.

b. Recognize and acknowledge the challenges and limitations of virtual/distance school counseling.

c. Implement procedures for students to follow in both emergency and nonemergency situations when the school counselor is not available.

d. Recognize and mitigate the limitation of virtual/distance school counseling confidentiality, which may include unintended viewers or recipients.

e. Inform both the student and parent/guardian of the benefits and limitations of virtual/distance counseling.

f. Educate students on how to participate in the electronic school counseling relationship to minimize and prevent potential misunderstandings that could occur due to lack of verbal cues and inability to read body language or other visual cues that provide contextual meaning to the school counseling process and school counseling relationship.

B. Responsibility to Self

B.3.h. School counselors seek consultation and supervision from school counselors and other professionals who are knowledgeable of school counselors' ethical practices when ethical and professional questions arise.

For additional reading on this topic please see: ASCA Covid-19 and School Shutdowns and ASCA Position Statement: The School Counselor and Virtual Schools

^Check your school's requirements based on national, regional and international data protection laws such as European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), U.S. Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA), U.S. Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act of 1996 (HIPAA) to name a few.

Safeguarding/Child Protection Implication during Online Learning

Counselors should review their school's Safeguarding/Child Protection Policy to ensure that the student's confidentiality, permissions, risks, reporting and safety plans are aligned with school policy in this new online learning format.

Determine a communication system for emergency situations. If a student is unsafe or at risk, counselors will need to develop a Safety Plan for that student. Part of the Safety Plan should involve the following:

- The student identifying warning signs, coping strategies, identifying trusted adults/friends whom the student can ask for help within their current locale.
- The counselor should have readily available contact information of professionals whom they can refer students and families to in the event of an emergency.
  - If the student is temporarily located in a different city from the school, the counselor is encouraged to connect with colleagues located in that city. ISCA

Members can access our Member Directory to reach out to colleagues for this purpose. If you need assistance please contact info@iscainfo.com.
- Monitoring student safety through regular virtual appointments.

Setting Boundaries

It is important to set boundaries on your time and the type of services you can and cannot offer. Using one of the many appointment apps available (Calendly, YouCanBookMe, etc), set up a system and procedure for students and parents to arrange for virtual appointments. Many schools are setting "working hours" similar to that of the school day. Within this format, school counselors are advised to adhere to those same working hours.

Where can I get support?

Counseling and working in an online environment can be isolating. It is important to seek consultation with colleagues and/or arrange for weekly supervision. We are also recommending that counselors partner up with another counselor at your school or a counselor at another international school for support. ISCA Members can access our Member Directory to reach out to colleagues for this purpose. If you need assistance please contact info@iscainfo.com.

Helpful resources and articles:

- The ISCA COVID-19 page on our website has important resources and new articles to support you and your efforts.
- The World Health Organization offers a helpful powerpoint presentation. Professional Counselors and professional school counselors may find this a helpful overview of the principles and interventions of Psychological First Aid. Psychological First Aid (PFA) for All – PowerPoint (WHO, 2016)

- Online Professional Development: Helping people to reduce stress symptoms and assist in a healthy recovery following a traumatic event, natural disaster, public health emergency, or even a personal crisis. Psychological First Aid Online (PFA)

Important to remember

Every school and country will have different regulations and policies. ISCA cannot specifically direct counselors as to "how" your online counseling program should run, but rather we offer this best practice statement as a reminder of "what" the counseling program should cover and the role of the school counselor.

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