# **Temple Carrig School**

## One-to-One Pastoral Care Meetings Policy

Draft

Temple Carrig School seeks to promote a caring and committed school community which facilitates the education of students and values each individual as a unique human being.

**Pastoral Care Team**

TCG Pastoral Care Team was established to ensure personal, social and emotional support for all students. The team is made up of Deputy Principals, Year Heads, Pastoral Care Team Co-ordinators, Guidance Counsellors, Chaplain, Support for Learning Co-ordinator and Dean of Discipline. The team meets weekly to discuss each year group and put support plans in place for individual students.

**TCG Pastoral Care Co-ordinators (PCC)**

* Arrange pastoral care team meetings
* Minute the meetings
* Oversee the running of one-to-one pastoral care meetings
* Ensure that the pastoral care meeting guidelines are adhered to
* Check in with specified staff timetabled to deliver pastoral support

**One-to-One Pastoral Care Meetings**

Pastoral Care meetings within Temple Carrig School can happen in a number of ways. A concerted effort is made to encourage students to view ANY member of staff as available to talk to them and to serve as their “one good adult” if needs be. All staff meeting with students one-to-one must be garda vetted.

Students can meet with:

* Guidance Counsellors
* Members of the Chaplaincy Team
* Year Heads and Form Tutors
* Specified staff with timetabled hours for Pastoral Support
* Any staff member at the request of the student

**PASTORAL CARE MEETING OPERATING GUIDELINES**

**What is a pastoral care meeting?**

Any meeting with a student in which personal, social or emotional issues are discussed. A pastoral care meeting can be arranged by a student directly or by referral to the pastoral care team via FT/YH/PCC.

Teachers conducting pastoral care meetings with students will be mindful of the following:

* Boundaries
* Child Safety Concerns
* Referral
* Pastoral Care Meeting Administration Procedures
* Helpful communication techniques
* Stages of a pastoral care meeting

**Boundaries**

* **One support staff per student**

A student will have pastoral care meetings with one staff member only. TCG staff will check if a student is meeting with another teacher or member of the Pastoral Care Team (PCT) before discussing personal, social or emotional issues with them. This can be checked with the student themselves or FT/YH/PCC. If a student is already meeting another staff member, the student will be comforted in the moment, and the relevant person contacted asap cc’ing FT/YH/PCC.

* **Duration of meetings**

Pastoral Care meetings will not exceed 40 minutes, with the exception of the first meeting which on occasion may take longer.

If a student is upset and unable to return to their day after a meeting, they will be offered a little time in the first aid/quiet room. If they are still too upset to return to class after maximum of one period in the quiet room, the office will contact the student’s parents and they will be collected from school.

* **Frequency of meetings**

This will be arranged with the student at the conclusion of the first meeting. A finite number of meetings (usually 4-6) will be offered. The 4-6 meetings can be weekly or bi-monthly depending on the issue being experienced by the student. After the agreed 4-6 meetings if a student is feeling better, short check-in meetings (5-10 minutes) will be offered. If they are not feeling better they will be referred for outside support.

* **Location and times of meetings**

One to one meetings will take place during the school day, on school grounds and in an open environment i.e. staff member and pupil visible through a glass panelled door. Meetings with students must not happen after school hours due to child safety considerations and lack of available support for teachers.

**Child Safety Concerns**

Students should be informed at the beginning of the first meeting of the limits of confidentiality which may involve sharing information about them. Concern for the safety of the student or another person overrides those of confidentiality and the concern will be discussed with the Year Head of Principal as a matter of urgency.

In particular, the staff member should be aware of their role as a Mandated Person under the terms of the *Children’s First Act 2015* and *Child Protection Procedures for Primary and Post-Primary Schools, 2017.* Any concerns (Child Protection) that a staff member has regarding the safety of a student will be discussed with the Principal (DLP) as a matter of urgency. If the principal is unavailable, the issue will be discussed with the Deputy Principal (DDLP)

**Referral**

* If a staff member has met with a student 4-6 times and the student’s issue is not improving, referral will be made to the pastoral care team who in turn may refer the student to outside services or a member of the Guidance Counselling Dept/Chaplaincy Team/designated Pastoral Care Team will meet with the student and become their one support person.
* If, at any stage, a staff member suspects a student may have a more serious underlying issue (self-harm, suicide ideation, depression, anxiety disorder, eating disorder etc.) or if the student makes a disclosure of a serious nature (self-harm, suicide ideation, depression, anxiety disorder, eating disorder etc.) an immediate referral will be made to the pastoral care team.

**If a disclosure of self-harm or suicide ideation is expressed, the procedures outlined in the centre of the staff handbook will be followed.**

* If a staff member feels their own wellbeing is being negatively impacted by the effort of supporting a student,the student should bereferred to the pastoral care team.
* If a student is not adhering to the boundaries agreed in relation to meeting times and frequency and is requesting more frequent meetings, the student will be referred on to the pastoral care team**.**

**One-to-one pastoral care meeting admin**

* Any staff member meeting a student will update VSware/FT/YH/PCC after meeting a student for the first time. VS ware notes will aim to protect the student’s privacy as much as possible. Staff members will refer to guidelines on language for VSware notes.
* Staff members will continue to update VSware/FT/YH/PCC if there is something significant to report at subsequent meetings.
* Staff member will update VSware/FT/YH/PCC when meetings stop.
* Staff members will keep detailed, dated notes of all pastoral care meetings. Notes will be confined to factual information. Hand written notes must be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Digital notes must be password protected.

**Helpful communication techniques for one-to-one meetings**

* **Active Listening**

Listen to understand the student, not to respond to them. Most of the time students just want to be heard or want someone to validate their feelings. Try not to rush to solve problems straight away, but tend to the student’s feelings and emotions first.

* **Reflect back**

To help a student feel heard and understood, staff members can try to reflect back, in their own words what they feel the student is saying and how they are feeling.

* **Ask open ended questions**

Sometimes students find it difficult to express what is going on for them. Asking open ended questions gives students a focus for their feelings/emotions.

Open ended questions usually begin with How, What, When, Where, Why.

**How** questionsusually facilitate talk about feelings and/or process.  
**What** questions often lead to facts and information.  
**When** questionsmost often bring out the timing of the problem, including what preceded and followed it.  
**Where** questionsusually enable discussion about the environment and situations.  
**Why** questionsusually elicit reasons.

* **Non Judgement**

**Reflect on one’s own state of mind**Before meeting a student, it’s important for staff members to make sure they are in the right frame of mind to talk and listen without being judgemental.

**Adopt an attitude of acceptance and empathy**Adopting an attitude of acceptance means respecting the student’s feelings, and experiences as valid, even if they are different from one’s own or don’t align with one’s own beliefs. Taking time to imagine oneself in the student’s place can help one be more empathetic.

**Use verbal and non-verbal skills**Simple responses can help a student know that a staff member is actively listening. These include using minimal responses like “I see”, “I understand”, “go on” etc., nodding one’s head and not interrupting. Tone of voice matters when speaking to students in pastoral care settings. Even if the right words are used, if the tone sounds angry, judgemental or dismissive, the student will not feel supported.

**Maintain positive body language**Positive body language can show the student that they are being listened to and that the listener cares. This includes maintaining comfortable eye contact, sitting down instead of standing, maintaining an open body position(non-folded arms, uncrossed legs etc.)and keeping facial expressions in check, regardless of what the student is disclosing.

**Stages in a pastoral care meeting**

* **Building Rapport**

Try to create a warm, welcoming atmosphere in a private, secure setting so the student feels safe to engage.

* **Setting the Contract**

Outlining the length of the meeting and child safety responsibilities. In second and subsequent meetings mentioning the agreed next steps from the previous meeting as a jumping off point.

* **Unpacking the Issue**

This is the most important part of the meeting, where, using the communication skills outlined above a teacher hears from the student about the issue they are dealing with. If this section of the meeting is rushed, the outcome is likely to be unsatisfactory and the student will feel unheard.

* **Problem Solving/Discussing Solutions/Next Steps**

Once the student has unpacked the issue and feels heard, staff members can gently move on to problem solving, discussing solutions or just agreeing some next steps that might help the student. The student’s ideas and opinions must be considered at this stage of the meeting.

Often times students, even younger students, know the solution in a situation and just need someone to talk through the options with them.

Do ask:

“What do you think might help to improve things?”

Do not say:

“Do you know what you should do”.

* **Summarising**

When coming to the end of the agreed meeting time (perhaps with 5 minutes remaining), it is useful to summarise what has taken place in the meeting, including the main issues are that were raised by the student and the next steps, if any have been agreed. This summarising can provide a gentle exit from the meeting and arrangements can be made for the next meeting. It is not advisable to ask an open ended question with only have 5 minutes left in a meeting as it will be difficult to finish on time and it can be stressful for a student if they begin talking about a new issue or aspect of an issue and get cut off when the bell goes.

*Approved by the Board of Management following a consultation process with the Student Council, PTA Committee and Teaching Staff:*

*23rd August 2023*