



I need to support a student

Although Christian schools work is often assumed to only include taking assemblies and lessons or running Christian groups, pastoral support for students is also a very common activity by schools workers. Support might range from informal conversations with students during break times to scheduled counselling sessions or therapeutic groups. This guide explores the kind of pastoral support options available, the skills needed to work effectively, and the qualifications and accreditation available.

▶ Pastoral support within the education system

It isn't too long ago that the concept of formal pastoral support would have been alien to many schools. Students were in school to learn, and their emotional well-being was the responsibility of their family or the doctor. Of course, good teachers have always provided some kind of pastoral care, but the idea of a school devoting resources and staff to anything other than teaching the curriculum would have been very rare.

In the last twenty years this has changed radically in most schools. There is a general acceptance that not only must schools educate young people, they must also enable them to be emotionally and mentally in a receptive state to be educated. Alongside the teachers and administrators, who made up the staff in the past, there are now a wide range of non-teaching staff providing this pastoral care, as well as occasional input from specialists from the local council's education team. The number of non teaching pastoral staff is growing: between 1996 and 2003 their numbers doubled in secondary schools.

Support for pupils could now come from any of the following:

▣ Heads of Year

Although traditionally this has been an additional responsibility for a teacher, some schools are now employing non-teaching pastoral heads (often for a group of Year Groups: eg. a keystage 3 pastoral head).

▣ Form Tutors

It is still very common for every student to be in a form with its own teacher who gives frontline pastoral support to the class and may follow the same group through their school career.

▣ Education Welfare Officer (EWO)

Primarily responsible for resolving attendance issues, they may also help to arrange alternative educational provision for excluded pupils or prepare reports on pupils with special educational needs as part of the statementing process. Many educational welfare officers work from council offices with each one responsible for a geographical area containing several schools. However some local councils have based

their EWO in a school where they can give more pastoral input.

✦ **Connexions Workers**

Connexions is the Government's front line support service for all young people aged 13-19. There are nearly 50 Connexions partnerships covering the whole of England, although there are significant variations in the way they are organised and staff are deployed. Many will work from Connexions offices based around an area, but some staff may be placed directly in a school. Connexions workers may visit a school to provide careers advice to a student, help deal with a pastoral issue or attend a formal meeting about a student's welfare.

✦ **Learning Mentors**

Learning mentors originated from a government initiative called Excellence in Cities. They work with school and college students to help them address barriers to learning, although the way they are used in schools varies widely. Some learning mentors roles remain focused on issues around learning, others have a brief that has evolved to include general pastoral support of students.

✦ **Behaviour support**

Although this may be known by different terms, many schools have staff working to help students with behavioural difficulties. It's common for there to be at least two teams, in secondary schools, dealing with keystage 3 and keystage 4. Their work might include having a student in a separate room for some or all of the weekly timetable and working with them on issues around their behaviour alongside curriculum input.

✦ **Special Needs Teaching Assistants/Learning Support Assistants**

Many schools with have a team of special needs teaching assistants who's role is to help pupils with a wide range of severe learning, physical or behavioural difficulties, often whilst they are in mainstream lessons. They will be overseen by a Special Needs Co-ordinator, which can either be a full time role or taken on part time by a subject teacher.

✦ **Looked After Children Coordinator**

Schools will normally allocate a member of staff to be formally responsible for issues relating to looked after children.

✦ **Youth Workers**

A strong divide has existed between education and a council's youth service for many years. However some councils and individual schools are rethinking this approach and even appointing their own youth worker on site. Others are forging closer links with a youth club which may meet on the school site (but be run separately by the local council's youth department).

▶ **Pastoral support outside the education system**

Although schools have comprehensive systems and staff for caring for pupils, they will often still need further support from outside agencies. There are an increasing number of local and national charities and businesses offering mentoring, pastoral and therapeutic services to schools. This could include training for staff and well as one off or regular input with students. It is in this context that a Christian schools worker may be able to offer their services.

There are a lot of ways you can offer pastoral support in a school. Much will depend on the how much the school welcomes outside agencies, the workers relationship with the school, and of course, your experience and ability in delivering the support. There are a huge number of ways to give input, some involving occasional visits, some where you may be working in the school several days a week or more. Some schools treat long term schools workers as 'members of staff' and may even provide offices and other administrative support.

📌 Informal detached youth work

Ad hoc input with students during breaks and lunchtimes can be extremely valuable in picking up issues and directing students onto further support. Some schools will therefore view this kind of work as extremely helpful and a schools worker may be free to 'roam' around the school at will chatting to young people. This kind of work can be intimidating if you are not known in the school, so visibility through curriculum input like school assemblies can help a great deal in 'breaking the ice'.

📌 Individual support/mentoring

Schools may ask you to work with a particular student and provide some additional support to complement what is already being offered to the student through the school. In some instances, this might remain informal: "Keep an eye for so-and-so and make sure they're doing ok" but it's also likely to include meeting with the student at pre-arranged times during the school day. Although some schools will not allow a student to leave a lesson for a pastoral appointment, most are flexible about this and you may be able to arrange to meet a student at the same time each week. This kind of work is often simply giving students the opportunity to talk about what's happening to them and their feelings. In other words, it is not directive counselling - requiring training and qualifications - but a kind of mentoring. Schools workers are often well placed to provide this kind of support because they may be seen by the student as a safe and friendly adult, and not a member of the school staff. If the student is having trouble with their behaviour and attitude to the school's authority, they may be a crucial context where they feel able to talk openly about what is happening to them.

One of the negatives associated with this kind of work is the difficulty in fixing clear aims or objectives. Consequently, this kind of work can tend to drift with no clear end in sight and weekly meetings can become less productive, and even taken for granted by the student. It is often helpful to agree with the school and student a specific period of support, after which they will be a review and a decision will be made together about whether to continue on to a further agreed period.

Schools are also notorious for having few suitable places to meet students in this way. Often offices or even corridors are co-opted into action for the purpose. It's always important to consider any relevant child protection issues and ensure that you are following the school's procedure for contact with students: for example, you may find it better to be in a corner of the school library rather than locked away in an obscure and small office with the door closed. There are also issues related to working with student's of the opposite gender and it's vital to have a clear policy agreed with the school about this.

📌 Counselling

Although 'counselling', 'mentoring' and 'coaching' are often used as interchangeable terms, technically they have different meanings. There are many different types of counselling, typically humanistic, psychodynamic, cognitive or behavioural, all based on different theories and approaches. Counselling is not normally directive, in the sense that the student is told what they should do: instead the counsellor's role is to help the student understand their situation and the options open to them.

At present there are no legal minimum qualifications necessary to practise as a counsellor in the UK. However there are a wide range on training courses and accreditation available from evening courses to higher level degrees. The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy is a good place to start investigating if you are interested in finding out more.

Even though unqualified schools workers can therefore theoretically offer 'counselling' in a school, you should be wary of applying this term unless you do have some accreditation or recognised qualification. Counsellors may have specific legal duties to their 'clients' (the law is still developing in this area) and the

best advice is to limit unqualified input to 'listening' and 'supporting'.

🔍 Learning support

Schools may ask you to help with the learning support programme, where students receive extra help and support from you in their normal lessons. You may be asked, for example, to support a student whenever they have a maths lesson, to help them with a difficult relationship with a particular teacher, or because they find maths especially challenging. In this case you would sit with the student in the lesson and help them whenever there is a task set. However, you should be aware that schools will have received money within their budget to support particular students and that they are legally obliged to employ staff to fulfill these requirements. This kind of work can help schools, but can also be a way for them to avoid paying for these services, and using the money elsewhere.

🔍 Group work

Although most counselling and pastoral support, even in schools, is done one to one with individual students, there are considerable advantages to offering input to groups of students. Often this might take the form of an anger management group or a group for young people who have been bullied. Groups allow input not only from those leading them, but also from a student's peers. Finding that you are not alone in facing an issue can be a huge encouragement to a young person.

There are a growing number of group programmes that are available for a schools worker to use 'off the shelf' which means that, providing you have the skills to lead and manage a group, you may be able to offer a wide range of group programmes to schools. Some of the more commonly requested groups topics include:

- anger management
- conflict resolution skills
- low self esteem
- victims of bullying
- social and friendship skills
- lifeskills

🔍 Therapeutic work

In this guide, we are using 'therapeutic' as a term to define more specialised input to a young person with more complex emotional needs. This kind of work may be one to one or in a group, but will always require a more experienced worker. Topics might include:

- self harm
- eating disorders
- adhd
- being in care
- bereavement

🔍 The advantages of pastoral work

Pastoral work is a great way to serve a school and its students as a Christian schools worker. Many schools workers are experienced youth workers and helping students deal with emotional and behavioural issues is something they will feel equipped and able to deliver. Schools often benefit from the fact that schools workers are seen as friendly and approachable by young people, and not part of the school 'system'. A schools worker may therefore be able to strike up a relationship with a student who finds it difficult to relate to

teachers or others in authority.

Schools workers also have the advantage of not being as closely tied to the school working day. You may be able to visit students, with the relevant permission, after school or during the evening. If a student is truanting, it may be easier for a schools worker to leave the school site and check on some known 'hang outs'. This kind of flexibility can be a significant advantage to the school and makes your input even more valuable.

▶ Training and professional development

Pastoral work is often challenging and complex and so the right training is essential. Many larger schoolswork organisations provide their own training programme and some offer their training to other schoolsworkers and smaller organisations too.

However, there are also plenty of other places to find training and support for this kind of schoolswork:

📌 Courses and qualifications

Many colleges and universities run part time and evening courses in counselling and other related subjects. These courses have the advantage of having recognition and validation across many contexts, including education. Although they are a significant investment of time and money, they can equip you to offer a far more professional and effective service to schools. Some Christian organisations also run courses which include training in pastoral work, either full or part time. Check out the 'professional development' pages of the schoolswork.co.uk website to find out more.

📌 Books

There are many books published on the subject of the pastoral care of young people in education. If you're serious about offering this kind of service to schools, you may like to get hold of some or all of the best of these. You'll find more information on the 'professional development' pages of schoolswork.co.uk.

📌 Visits and observations

With hundreds of schoolsworkers across the UK, you may find it helpful to visit a project that is already working in this field. Whilst it may not be training in the sense of a course or programme of study, a huge amount can be gleaned from seeing what others are doing. A model of good practice may be to put aside a couple of days a year to visit other Christian schools projects. You can use the database of projects in the links area of the schoolswork.co.uk website to find out who's working near you.

▶ Good practice guidelines

Providing pastoral support in a school setting raises some important issues about developing good practice in the way you work with students. In almost all situations, you will be subject to the school's own requirements and you should find out if there are any written policies or guidelines. Some of the issues that might be raised include:

📌 CRB disclosures

Even if you have a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) disclosure from a church or other body, it is common to have to complete another CRB check through the school. Normally working with children requires an Enhanced Disclosure.

📌 Record keeping

Schools may have procedures and paperwork for recording pastoral work with students. You may be required to follow these rather than any systems you may have as a church or schoolswork organisation. Even if there are no requirements from the school, it is important to keep a record of your contact with a

student, including when, where, what was discussed and any other relevant material. You should make sure these notes comply with any requirements of the Data Protection Act 1998. You should also note that, unlike many counselling situations with young people outside schools, parents may have a right to see your notes.

❖ **Parental permission**

Despite many changes in the law regarding a young person's ability to seek help without parental permission, schools are very different contexts. It is a parent's right to be consulted if a student is being given pastoral support, taken out of a lesson or, most importantly, taken anywhere off school premises. Schools workers should follow the schools guidelines closely and make sure that they do not end up compromising themselves, the student or the school.

▶ **Working with students of a different gender**

Schools workers will need to think carefully about whether they work with a student of the opposite gender in a pastoral context which may involve one-to-one work and the sharing of personal information. Again, it's important to agree what is appropriate with the school. Group work is an easier context to work in this way, although it is preferable to have both a male and female leader for this kind of work.

▶ **Meeting in an appropriate context**

Suitable places to meet a student might include:

- ‡ Rooms set aside for the purpose of pastoral work
- ‡ The school library
- ‡ Meeting rooms where the door can be left open
- ‡ Rooms with windows into central common areas

Unsuitable places might include:

- ‡ Classrooms after school when others have gone
- ‡ Rooms used as a walkthrough or which will be regularly disturbed
- ‡ Rooms isolated from the rest of school (eg. a portacabin)

▶ **Working one-to-one**

Supporting a particular student can make a huge impact on them and their school experience. Even with comprehensive pastoral systems, schools often will not have the resources to spend extra time with students suffering from bereavement, struggling with a personal issue or finding it hard to cope in some other way. The impact a friendly and supportive adult can have is huge. For many Christian schools workers, this kind of work is the most rewarding and exciting kind of input they can offer.

Working one-to-one might involve a range of contacts with a particular student: you may be meeting them regularly as an appointed time each week, but also having further input informally at breaks and lunchtimes. The student may even also be in an anger management or other therapeutic group that you are running. Outside of school, you may be able to visit the student's home, liaise with parents and act as an advocate to both parents and school staff.

This kind of work involves considerable skills in keeping the right boundaries and getting the balance between being a adult friend to the student and representing the school and their wishes. For example, you may find yourself listening to a pupil talking about their difficulties with a member of staff, and their view that the teacher involved is unreasonable in some way. You may also find the school insisting that the real issue lies with the student and asking you to bring the student round to that view. These kinds of dilemmas

and issues and implicit in pastoral work in schools and you will have to tread carefully to make sure you make the right choices. Having some supervision in your work is essential in these kind of situations and it's good practice to have someone, either in or outside the school, who you can refer to for guidance and wisdom. Talking through your feelings and experiences also helps schools workers cope with some of the highly emotional and challenging situations they may face. For example, working with a student who is self harming can be traumatic and emotionally draining. Schools workers need to have the right pastoral care for themselves to make sure they cope with these situations and are able to give their best to students.

Despite these potential pitfalls, supporting a student remains one of the most rewarding and powerful ways for schools workers to contribute to a school. Developing the expertise needed and following good practice will give you a strong base to make a real difference.

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