ACORNS
INTERNATIONAL SCHOOL | KISAASI

Student Counselling Policy

Acorns believes that the total development of a student is supported through qualified school counsellors, who will offer expertise in monitoring students' welfare and guiding their emotional development, promote student's success, provide preventive services and respond to identified student needs by implementing a comprehensive school counselling program that addresses academic and personal/social development for all students.

Acorns Vision

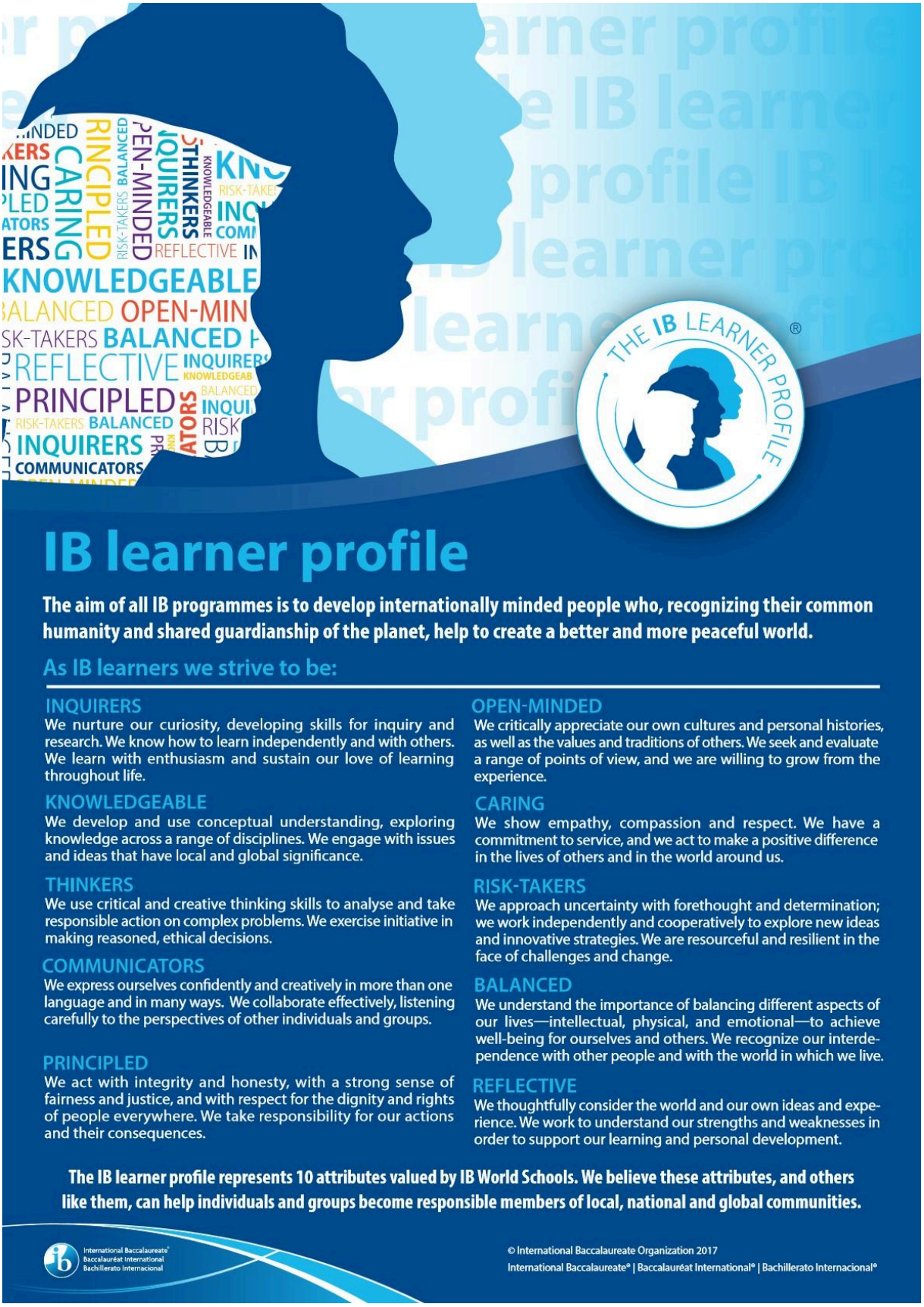
To inspire and empower each other to achieve our personal best.

Acorns Mission

To build an accessible, inclusive learning community of global citizens that pursues academic excellence in a holistic, inquiry-based environment that develops lifelong learners with the attributes to shape a better and more peaceful world.

Acorns Core Values

IB Learner Profile



"IB learner profile"

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Student Counselling Policy

1 Purpose

The Student Counselling Policy establishes a clear framework for the practices and responsibilities of school counsellors at Acorns International School. This policy aims to provide comprehensive guidance to counsellors, ensuring they deliver consistent, ethical, and effective support to students.

2 Scope

This policy outlines the specific responsibilities of counsellors to various stakeholders, including students, parents or legal guardians, teachers, and school management, promoting transparency and accountability. Furthermore, this policy defines the scope of the counselling programme, ensuring it addresses the diverse needs of students while fostering their emotional, social, and academic development.

3 Definitions

Counsellors

- Members of Acorns staff are trained professional counsellors. Responsible for teaching PSPE lessons and student counselling. As of the 2024-2025 academic year, there are 2 school counsellors; one for Primary and one for Secondary. In the event that an Early Years student needs these services, they would be provided by the Primary Counsellor.

Parents

- Throughout this policy, unless otherwise noted, “parents” are in reference to a student's biological parents or legal guardians.

Head of Department(HoD)

- Used to refer to a specific Department Head. All HoDs report to the DHoS and HoS. In this policy, the HoD is in reference to the academic department Head. ie. Head of Early Years, Head of Primary, Head of Secondary. These HoDs are the counsellors’ line managers.

Designated Safeguarding Officers(DSO)

- Appointed members of school staff who are in charge of managing child protection and safeguarding concerns. Specific duties are outlined in the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy. DSOs are:
    - Secondary Counsellor
    - Primary Counsellor
    - Head of Primary
    - Head of Secondary
    - Head of Early Years
    - Head of School(HoS)
    - Deputy Head of School(DHoS)

Crisis Situation

- When a student is in danger to themselves or others, experiencing an abrupt mental issue and/or there is a child protection concern where a student is actively in danger.

Non-Crisis Situation

- When a student is experiencing emotional, social, academic, or behavioural challenges that do not pose an immediate threat to their safety or the safety of others. The matter can wait a short period of time to be addressed without causing risk to the student, or anyone else's, safety.

4 PSPE Lessons

The counsellors are responsible for teaching PSPE lessons in Primary and Secondary, as scheduled on timetables. In the Early Years Programme (EYP) these lessons are covered in the Play Based Learning slots by the homeroom teachers. While there is a programme to follow, teachers may feel that their class needs to work on something specific and may ask the counsellor to engage the students on the topic.

All themes are related to life skills that the students need in their educational and social lives.

These PSPE lessons will also be used to teach students about topics that can be sensitive. Acorns understands that families/cultures/religions may handle some topics differently.

In Primary, if PSPE is going to cover a sensitive matter, communication will be sent out to parents ahead of time with an outline of what will be talked about with the class. If a family feels that they do not want their child to participate in some lessons, the family can let the teacher or HoD know.

In Secondary, a PSPE Overview of content will be sent at the beginning of the academic year. If a family feels that they do not want their child to participate in some lessons, the family can let the teacher or HoD know in advance.

5 Student Group Counselling

Group counselling is a therapy format that approaches different kinds of issues through the use of interpersonal interaction – to interact with others, to identify and understand our patterns and to change them. Group interactions provide an opportunity to build relationships and receive interpersonal feedback about how we interact with one another. The students can gain specific skills and strategies to meet personal goals, explore areas that present unique challenges, and gain support and encouragement from others. It is one of the most effective ways to explore and support changes you wish to make in your life. Through group counselling the counsellor can also advise and/or start individual counselling sessions.

The topics of the group counselling sessions will be chosen with the help of the difficulties and issues that are seen by the counsellors, the students, teachers, HoDs and/or administrators.

For example, students who are struggling with compulsive behaviour, anger issues, grief, or addictions may get group counselling. The group counselling sessions will focus on their coping skills, positive reflection and/or group support.

6 Individual Student Counselling

Individual counselling is a collaborative effort between the student and the counsellor. The goal is to provide an open, supportive, and confidential environment for the student to address the issues that are concerning him/her. Counselling is a process that can help students to empower

them and to identify more effective strategies, both to cope with difficult situations and to achieve their goals. While some students who seek counselling have chronic emotional difficulties, most are dealing with normal life events and are simply in need of an objective listener - someone who doesn't judge and who can help them see new alternatives.

7 Monitoring and Assessment

The school counsellors may enter lessons at any time to observe the students to see what kind of interventions are needed. This can result in classroom lessons and/or individual or group counselling sessions. They can assess the effectiveness of the school counselling program by having meetings with the students, HOS, HoDs, teachers and parents/guardians.

8 Preventative Workshops

Preventative workshops help the students to be more conscious while making their decisions, which helps them to make the right choices and be less sensitive to peer pressure. Topics that could be covered, but are not limited to, are bullying, behaviour, healthy relationships, online safety, self-defence and drugs/alcohol. Guest speakers can be invited to make it more lively and interesting for them.

By having fun and educational activities, the students learn to become a better version of themselves and to help others in making the right choices.

The wider Acorns Community may also receive workshops on relevant topics.

9 Responsibility to Students

The school counsellor will treat all students with respect and as unique individuals. Students can see the school counsellor if they are facing any issues or problems concerning their educational, personal and social needs. The school counsellor will be professional and will not bring in their own personal values and beliefs into discussions or training sessions. The school counsellor will put effort into supporting the student where needed.

10 Referral to the School Counsellor(Non-Crisis)

Below are the following methods a student could be referred to a school counsellor.

Online Referral Form

Referrals can be made to the counsellor by the HoD's, parents, caregivers, teachers and/or administrators through the online referral forms.

EYP/PYP Referral Form

Secondary Referral Form

The form responses are only accessible to the corresponding school counsellor. In the event of a child protection concern, the response may be shared with the DSOs.

Student Self-Rerral
Students who need to visit the school counsellor for any non-crisis issue can visit them during breaks or after lesson hours. To the discretion of the counsellor, the student may also be seen during a lesson with the HoDs approval.

Parent Referral
If a parent wants to schedule a meeting with the school counsellor, they should complete the Referral Form and mention when they are available for a meeting. Contact the counsellor via;
Primary counsellor: pypcounsellor@acornskisaasi.com
Secondary counsellor: secondarycounsellor@ais.ac.ug
or make an appointment via the respective HoD.

11 Crisis Situations

A crisis is when a student is in danger to themselves or others, experiencing an abrupt mental issue and/or there is a child protection concern where a student is actively in danger.

If the student is in school, they should immediately be permitted to see the school counsellor.

If a crisis takes place outside of school, the parent/guardian should take this seriously and contact the proper authorities. Once a situation is stable, the school counsellor may then be contacted for further communication with the school and guidance.

School cell phone numbers of the school counsellors can be distributed to parents and/or students. Personal cell phone numbers are never allowed to be shared. If the school counsellor is not reachable, please contact the HoD.

If the student's safety from emotional and physical harm is affected, the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy is relevant

12 Parent Rights and Responsibilities

Acorns understands it is the right of the parents to guide their children in their lives. We balance the obligation for confidentiality to students and the rights of the parents in mind. Counsellors will always encourage students to open up to their families themselves concerning their thoughts and feelings.

In situations where the counsellor feels it is necessary to reach out to the family, the student will be involved. If the student doesn't feel comfortable opening up to the family directly, the counsellor will discuss with the student what kind of information will be shared upon meeting with the family. The school counsellor's goal is to set up a relationship with the parents/guardians whereby both have an important influence in developing an academically strong and personally/socially healthy student.

The school counsellors must contact the parents when:

- Concerns regarding the student's emotional well-being or continuous behavioural issues
- Students talking about (substance)abuse, self-harm, and emotional difficulties
- When the student self-referrs to the counsellor on a regular basis

- When the counsellor recommends seeing the student on a regular basis, based on observation or a school community member referral.

In the event a child protection concern is found out during counselling, the Acorns Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy applies. The parents may not be notified of the counselling sessions or content if the Designated Safeguarding Officers(DSOs) decide that notification puts the child at greater risk.

Parent Refusal of School Counselling

Where a parent does not agree to their child having counselling the parent can notify the respective HoD or Counsellor. When the parent contacts the counsellor, their respective HoD should be informed, and a plan will be devised to address the parent or guardian of the child in the best interest of the child and school requirements.

Acorns holds the right to deny or not continue with the enrollment of any student. In the event that the school and parents can not agree on a counselling plan to support the student, it may lead to the unenrollment of that student.

13 Referral to Outside Professionals

The school counsellors can make referrals when necessary or appropriate to other professionals for student and/or family support. The respective school counsellor and HoD will give the family options and will help them to plan it in a way that there are no or little educational interruptions for the student. Students who are referred are still allowed to make use of the services that the school counsellor provides in school.

The school may make a referral for a student to see a professional outside of school if:

- Specialised Mental Health Support: The student requires specialised therapy (e.g., trauma therapy, cognitive behavioural therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy) that goes beyond the scope of the school counsellor's training.
- Conflict of Interest: The student or family has a personal relationship with the school counsellor that may compromise objectivity or confidentiality.
- Crisis Intervention: The student is experiencing a severe mental health crisis (e.g., suicidal ideation, self-harm, severe anxiety attacks) that requires immediate and intensive support from a licensed psychologist or psychiatrist.
- Legal or Court-Ordered Counselling: The student is mandated by a court to receive counselling services that must be provided by an external licensed therapist or social worker.
- Parental Preference: Parents or guardians prefer external counselling due to cultural, personal, or privacy reasons.
- Diagnostic Assessments: The student requires a formal diagnosis that must be conducted by a licensed clinical psychologist or psychiatrist.
- Substance Abuse Issues: The student is dealing with substance abuse or addiction, which may require a specialised rehabilitation program or addiction counselling.
- Severe Behavioural Issues: The student exhibits behaviour that cannot be managed within the school's counselling scope.

- Specialist Recommendations: A medical professional, such as a paediatrician or psychiatrist, has recommended specific external therapeutic support.
- Extended or Intensive Therapy Needs: The student needs ongoing, long-term therapy that cannot be effectively managed within the limited scope of school counselling services.

Acorns holds the right to deny or not continue with the enrollment of any student. In the event that the school and parents can not agree on a counselling plan to support the student, it may lead to the unenrollment of that student.

14 School Counselling Limitations

The school counsellors will not provide the following services to the student and/or the parents/guardians:

- Testifying in court in child custody matters
- Providing intensive long-term counselling services for students in case of severe trauma or prolonged mental health concerns. This is after following the earlier-mentioned protocols, including referrals and sessions
- School counsellors are not available for routine family counselling
- School counsellors follow the Acorns calendar and are not available during the non-school days.
- School counsellors are for student counselling only. Ie. no staff should see the school counsellor, parents should only see the school counsellor for matters related to their children.

15 Confidentiality

Confidentiality will be maintained for all students, parents, teachers and/or other parties that seek out the counsellor, unless there are concerns about the safety of the student or others around them. For example, self harm and/or suicidal thoughts/attempts, substance abuse, violent threats, or when legal requirements demand it. If the school counsellor thinks that it would be best for the student to share some of the information, they will inform the student prior to that. The counsellor reports to the respective HoD; typically just to report a general and simple update, without personal information.

Parents will be notified for consent if their child is seeing the counsellor regularly. Prior to this the counsellor will encourage the student to open up to the parents/guardians. However, if the reason for the child seeing the counsellor has to do with neglect or abuse at home, a Designated Safeguarding Officer will be notified, and the child's family may not be made aware until there is an understanding of the situation.

We protect the confidentiality of the students' records and personal data. Personal data that is stored or sent electronically is treated with care.

If the student's safety from emotional and physical harm is affected, the Child Protection and Safeguarding Policy is relevant.

16 Relevant International Baccalaureate(IB) Standards and Practices

- Student support 2.1: The school implements and reviews systems and processes to identify the needs of students. (0202-02-0100)
- Student support 3: The school fosters the social, emotional, and physical well-being of its students and teachers. (0202-03)
- Student support 3.3: The pedagogical leadership team and teachers support students' social, emotional and physical well-being. (0202-03-0300)
- Student support 3.4: The school promotes open communication based on understanding and respect. (0202-03-0400

17 Relevant Council of International Schools(CIS) Standards and Criteria

- A4. The guiding statements provide clear commitment to wellbeing, conform to the CIS Code of Ethics, and demonstrate commitment to the values inherent in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1990).
- E3. The school ensures the physical and mental health and overall wellbeing of all enrolled students.
- E5. The school provides active support for students and families in transition in and out of the school, as well as between divisions within the school, through appropriate information, programmes, counselling and advice, drawing upon local agencies and external expertise when needed.

18 Citation

- "IB learner profile" *Sso.ibo.org*, resources.ibo.org/data/g_0_iboxx_amo_1702_2_e.pdf.

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