

We took him to the vet for a euthanasia injection. As we arrived, a nurse informed us that only two of our three family members could be present at a two-metre distance. Before we could stop her, our daughter walked outside. Just before the injection was given, the vet, in an act of kindness, stated 'go and get your daughter'. This allowed us to share in our goodbyes. The vet's compassion overrode the rigid guidance to allow for a more humane response. (As I write this, I am mindful of the many tragic human deaths where loved ones were not allowed to be present, especially early on in the pandemic).

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Why self-care in education process and how therapeutic professionals involved

Linda Hafez

In this article, I will be exploring the importance of personal self-care as a therapist and then considering how therapeutic supervision helps promote the self-care of teaching staff and show that this is beneficial for all involved in the education system, especially young people.

In my role as lead counsellor, I have encouraged teaching staff to think about how they can develop a reflective supervision space that allows them to think about the impact of their actions on young people and explore their fears and understandings of the systems around them. It has been reported to me that, once they have this space to reflect, they have a greater capacity to hold young people in mind when they come to them and are less hasty to refer them on. The aim is to create a trickle-down effect. Supervision supports a head of year that can then hold 260 young people within their year group without feeling isolated.

Working with holding both school staff anxiety and the emotional needs of young people can be emotionally demanding and, in my view, should not be done by the school's therapist. It can create a conflict of interest, becoming very overwhelming and creating a greater sense of isolation for the therapist within the school. This is where I suggest that therapeutic supervision for staff should be brought into the education setting.

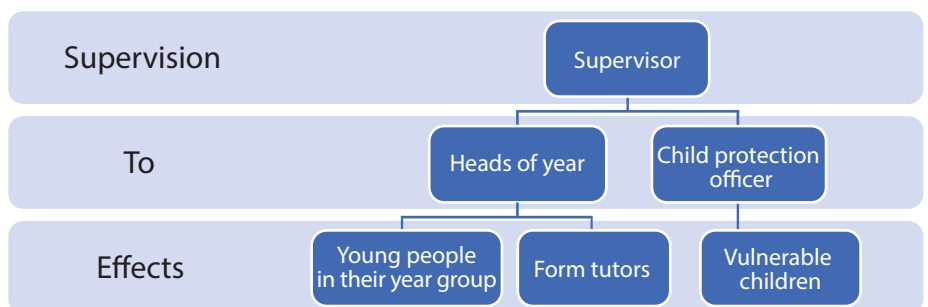
Self-care for counsellors in schools is something I have been thinking about and working on for many years. For the most part of my career, I have led teams, which has meant I have not only had to think about looking after my own emotional wellbeing, but that of my team, including trainees who need extra support.

Understanding the education environment is important as it often means I must think outside the box. I am often working in isolation as the other staff in the

environment is from a teaching background, with a different working perspective to mine. It often means staff cross boundaries without realising this. For example, trying to discuss individual students in public areas or bringing children to your door in crisis. This results in a need for quick thinking without correct support.

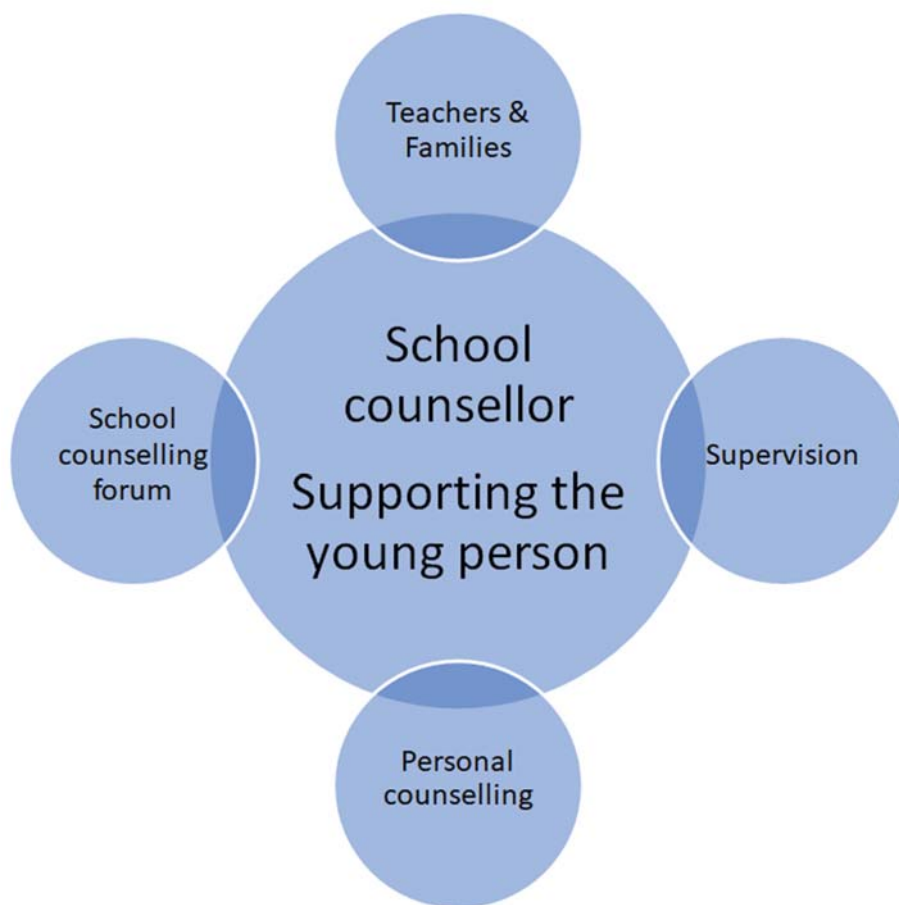
My own self-care in schools has taken me time to build. Supervision is common practice and I have always looked for experienced professionals who have worked within the school environment for many years. However, I needed more than this. I wanted somewhere to share resources, feel supported and at points to process my surroundings.

I started a counselling forum to form a strong network of school-based counsellors. This allowed a space to bounce ideas around. It also helped to save time, as we would share resources and help to think through difficult dilemmas around the politics of the schools



Therapeutic supervision in schools pathways

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School counsellors support map

rather than the one-to-one therapy that was taking place. We inspired each other to work more systemically in our practice and work within the school community with teachers and parents. Very often, just a friendly face and some reassurance from school-counselling colleagues was worth more than its weight in gold!

Personal therapy with a therapist who understands school systems meant that I had a place to take my own feelings, which may get in the way of my work. It allowed exploration of how I may be looking at things through the lenses of my own value system. Personal therapy is a helpful way to stay connected to understanding self in relation to how my work impacts on aspects of my personal life; for example,

how I function as a parent. It also helped me to develop a self-care routine, allowing me symbolically to leave my work at school and mark the change of energy when going home.

For many years, I used to swim after work to wash off the day and provide a transition back into my own family life. Getting a balance between being a single mother of two teenagers myself and my professional career felt key. In therapy, I was able to explore experiences of feeling like a fraud when at points I was struggling myself to implement the tools I was sharing around parenting – something supervision does not always allow you to do.

Once I had all the things I could do personally to support myself in my role,

I then had to think more about external factors. Within school settings, what could I be doing to help support myself, my team of counsellors and the teaching team.

Strong referral systems and operational manuals on how the system works and what to do in crisis is key to keeping everyone safe and sharing expectations of what counselling in schools can offer. Helping school staff to recognise that it takes a *whole system* to support the mental health of young people, not just the counselling department, helps to bring together collaborative thinking. It also enhances good relationships with staff leading them to work with, while respecting the boundaries of the counselling framework and understanding remits may be slightly different.

In my experience, I have at times been pulled into emotionally supporting staff with private issues and need to be clear about this being a conflict of interest to offer therapy to a teacher and a student of the same classroom. I have a number of counselling professionals to refer to when this arises. Knowing too much about the staff you work with can be complicated for everyone involved and possibly blurs professional roles.

How a systemic approach to self-care can help in schools

My personal experience of needing self-care has led me to have open conversations with teaching staff to think about self-care and how, if this is not in place, it can impact on their teaching abilities, leading to a negative learning environment for them and the young people they are teaching. Most teachers have come into the profession because of their passion for young people and not feeling good enough or frustrated with the limited resources can lead to early burnout.

Why self-care in education is a three-dimensional process and how therapeutic supervision can benefit all professionals involved

The need for self-care and therapeutic supervision for teaching staff

It is clear that teachers need support. School staff members are being exposed to more and more traumatic information and are often left worrying about young people's wellbeing. With nowhere to really share this, it is no wonder that teaching is now one of the most stressful professions. The stress is not just the actual teaching, but also the concerns about possible child protection and mental health issues, conflicts with management and dealing with parents. This can too often lead to teacher-burnout. A recent OFSTED report (Ofsted, 2019) stated that teachers are in a high percentage of being off work with a diagnosis of stress and depression. It suggests that schools need to put more supports in place.

We know their environment affects young people, so it makes sense to support all aspects of a young person's life. I have written in a previous article about the importance of supporting families in school (Hafez, 2016) but now I am especially interested in the school staff team.

Some years ago, I worked with a very progressive secondary school head teacher who saw the benefits in her heads-of-year having individual therapeutic supervision once a month. During this time, I would work with staff to think about mental health in their year group and how this affected their ability to work and function to the best of their ability. Therapeutic supervision in this setting helped staff deal with behaviour management and explore their understanding of what motivates a young person's behaviour. The time would often be broken down into two halves – themes and emotional wellbeing of the year group and then a focus on a student they might want to think about in greater detail.

I will cite one example from many. *"If a boy is being a bully but he has a difficult home life, how do I follow through the punishment of suspending him knowing his home life is abusive?"* This would be presented by the head of year and would require me to think about aspects such as: What are the concerns? Who are all the professionals involved? What are the

family and social issues, if any, around this young person? Who is raising the concern? Who is best to deal with the issues being raised? How might this impact on the young person and the year group? What impact might it have on the young person's accessing learning and the learning environment? What difficulties is this situation causing you and why?

Helping staff to think about confusion between the different roles and responsibilities of professionals can lessen frustration and anxiety and bring a more collaborative way of thinking.

Self-care in schools is a difficult thing to do, no matter the role. Schools, universities and further education providers are all being asked to do so much under one roof, such as providing support on healthy living through diet and physical activities, identifying learning difficulties and mental health needs and identifying child-protection needs while also promoting family and community life. It is often hard to single out their primary task to educate. I see so many teachers eating at their desks after being up most of the night, marking and meeting targets. Where is their self-care and how is this affecting their performance in the classroom? Being too overwhelmed to take on any more can lead teaching staff to make hasty counselling referrals, leading to a cycle which feels important to contain.

I hope I have shown how the use of therapeutic supervision from a counsellor well versed in school systems, and well grounded in their own support and self-care, can provide valuable and necessary support structures for school staff, leading to improved support all round and therefore better outcomes for children and young people. I also believe this way of working offers a holistic and cost effective way of practicing as it allows teachers a self-care space to explore emotional well being, allowing them to be able to concentrate on the primary task of teaching.

Post-script: How the present situation of COVID 19 has influenced the writing of this article

Recently, I had supervision with the school leadership team and pastoral

leads of several schools to help them think about the most effective, quickest and efficient way of checking in with young people while in isolation. I devised a scoring system to check young people's mood, anxiety and safety, along with numerous questions to check they felt safe. Joint thinking helps teaching staff access a wider range of young people and consider timely intervention. Now, more than ever, it is vital to create a sense of mutual care and support – to help everyone feel held, supported, contained and not alone in the most isolated of times.

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