

AI statement

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Counselling skills in practice: The role of being a wellbeing officer in further education

E works as a wellbeing officer in a further education college in West Wales. The well-being role E works in requires support to students who experience low mood, anxiety and social isolation. E is not employed as a qualified counsellor; however, they hold a CPCAB Level 3 Certificate in Counselling Studies, which enhances their ability to respond positively to emotional distress. Using these counselling skills, E must work within professional frameworks to ensure their role is carried out safely and effectively, and in a non-therapeutic context. This essay will critically examine the expertise required for the role using the Counselling Skills Competence Framework developed by the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP, 2020), the BACP Ethical Framework, the CPCAB Training Standards, and Welsh Government safeguarding guidance. Also using the applicable theoretical perspectives of the work, Carl Rogers and Gerard Egan.

The BACP (2020) draws a distinction between utilising counselling techniques to support a primary job and using them within formal therapeutic practice. This is critical to avoid confusion with job roles. Counselling skills help strengthen communication and relational depth whereas professional practice relies on rigorous training, ethical, and contractual boundaries. As a wellbeing officer, E must follow the counselling skills framework. This distinction is essential and must be adhered to ensure safe practice and maintain professional boundaries. Part of this framework includes establishing and maintaining relationships, which is critical. Treating students with respect, empathy and genuineness. This follows Rogers (1957), whose core beliefs were unconditional positive regard, congruence, active listening and empathy. All this together ensures everyone achieves personal growth.

Although E is not delivering the therapy, the support provided remains crucial.

Students may feel worried or ashamed about reaching out for support, so ensuring the environment is a non-judgmental, safe space is essential to help students feel heard.

The BACP framework emphasises managing the helping process. This means having time boundaries, clear goals and realistic outcomes. Wellbeing meetings are kept short, unlike long-term counselling. Following Egan's skilled helper model (2014), E may structure sessions using the three stages. Exploring the issue, identifying outcomes, setting goals, and considering practical next steps. As E's role is time-limited, this approach works well and lowers the risk of it becoming open-ended therapy. Critically, the ability to maintain emotional disclosure without delving too deeply into trauma is integral. Without the relevant therapeutic training, it could cause harm, which goes against the ethical principle of non-maleficence.

Ethical practice is another core area of competence. The BACP framework outlines autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice. These must be carefully balanced within E's role as a wellbeing officer. If a student discloses that they have thoughts of non-suicidal self-injury and asks not to share this information, it becomes a balance of autonomy and confidentiality. The ethical framework stipulates that confidentiality can be broken if there is a serious risk of harm. E must disclose this from the beginning of their rapport-building. Bond (2015) highlights the importance of ethical mindfulness; this approach is crucial when working with adults under eighteen or vulnerable adults in the management of specific safeguarding responsibilities.

Safeguarding is extremely important in a college setting and must align with the Welsh Government (2016) framework, which places a legal duty on educational settings to keep students safe. E must be able to recognise the signs of abuse, neglect or suicidal ideation. This can be done with awareness of the NHS or NICE guidelines, supporting students' safety and preventing the increase of mental health difficulties. The BACP competence framework highlights the ability to respond appropriately to this and to ensure direct, clear questions are asked about safety. Gould (2005) states that asking directly about suicide does not increase risk, as research consistently backs this up. Asking this direct question can reduce isolation and reduce the likelihood of a negative outcome. E must record concerns accurately and cooperate with the safeguarding team, remain accountable, and always demonstrate professional integrity.

As E has completed their CPCAB (2022) level 3, this framework reinforces the importance of working within competence and self-awareness. This framework also distinguishes between the use of counselling skills and counselling practice. The difference between the two is paramount. Counselling skills help improve communication and provide emotional support in the workplace. Counselling practice consists of enhanced training and therapeutic agreement. E must remain vigilant to these differences. If a student comes to E who is presenting with severe mental health difficulties or trauma, then they must signpost to the relevant services, such as an internal counselling service or an external mental health team. Working within this skills framework keeps the student and E protected.

Another fundamental competency requires anti-discriminatory approaches and culturally responsive practice. As section 25 of the Children's Act 2004 (c.31) states, E's role concerns students from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

This also includes a neurodiverse profile and disabilities. West Wales has Welsh-speaking communities, and language affects how emotions are conveyed. Price (2026) predicts a decline in Welsh speakers, but in Carmarthenshire, around 85,100 Welsh speakers are estimated. Cultural competence and awareness of potential bias are ingrained in the competence framework. Reflective practice helps E realise when biases or personal experience may sway professional judgement, risking minimising students' learning journey or misinterpreting it.

In addition to the one-to-one support that E gives, their role also involves promoting positive mental health across the college. This requires excellent communication and alliance. The BACP framework acknowledges that counselling skills are integrated into wider professional roles. This means that E must balance confidentiality with ethical self-disclosure. E can give staff members advice on supporting students who are feeling anxious without sharing any personal details. Fostering wellness through workshops or anxiety management demonstrates proactive cognitive-behavioural. However, these workshops must not be a substitute for therapy (Corey, 2024). Combining CBT-informed practice with active listening enables E to identify negative thoughts and use some coping strategies in a non-therapeutic setting. Early intervention is important, but it does not exclude the need for specialist services for students suffering from significant mental health difficulties.

Reflection is fundamental across all frameworks. Reflecting on this role highlights some challenges. The risk of blurred boundaries is one. As stated throughout, E uses counselling skills; some students may think they are a counsellor, which sets expectations differently. E must be transparent about what they can offer within their level of expertise, when referrals are needed, and when confidentiality must be breached. This job role comes with emotional impact and can weigh heavily.

Ensuring there is regular supervision and keeping up with reflective practice is important to ensure professional standards and well-being are maintained, as stated in the BACP framework. As well as reducing the risk of professional burnout. Reflecting on what went well and what needs improvement (Aldridge & Rigby, 2001). Reflective practice is not optional; it supports accountability and maintains safe practice.

The well-being role draws some conflicts and limitations. Clear boundaries must remain critical to avoid blurring the distinction between the use of counselling skills and counselling practice. Honesty about the support that can be offered must be given from the beginning to maintain ethical standards. Student persistence and grades are often pressured in an educational setting, but as a well-being officer, their well-being must remain the top priority. Ethical practice means students' needs come first. If a student is struggling with social isolation, their attendance and mood may be affected. Feeling unsupported in college can lower motivation, cause anxiety and reduce self-confidence, making it harder to engage in learning. Research shows that loneliness is linked to a higher amount of psychological distress amongst students, which emphasises the need for quick-acting support to make them feel supported (Tian et al., 2025). Struggling with group activities, missing deadlines and avoiding seeking help. This is why, as a wellbeing officer, it is important to monitor attendance and ensure that no student is struggling in silence.

In conclusion, the role of a wellbeing officer in further education requires integration with a range of frameworks, including ethical, safeguarding, and organisational frameworks. The BACP (2020) counselling skills competence framework provides guidance on rapport building and session management. The BACP ethical framework helps safeguard and promote ethical decision-making. The

CPCAB level 3 qualification strengthens self-awareness and role boundaries. The Welsh Government's safeguarding guidance establishes legal compliance in education. These frameworks together help keep students safe and respectful and help them know when appropriate support is needed. Empathy and communication are demanded in this role, but so are clear boundaries, supervision and reflective practice.

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