


Master of Counselling Professional Field Placement

Guidebook for schools hosting
students on placement

A photograph showing two young men in a discussion. One man, with a beard and wearing a brown long-sleeved shirt, is looking towards the other man. The second man, with curly hair and wearing a white shirt, is seen from the side, looking back at the first man. They appear to be in a modern, brightly lit indoor setting, possibly a school or office. The image is partially obscured by a dark green gradient at the top and bottom of the page.

Creative
thinkers
made here.



Thank you for warmly welcoming one of our Master of Counselling (MoC) students to your school! We hope this partnership will make a significant difference in the lives of the young people, families and staff within your school community.

Our primary objective is to ensure a seamless and productive placement experience. As such, we have created the following resource to address potential challenges and offer practical recommendations for effective management of our students*.

The information in this resource has been developed by incorporating insights and experiences shared by previous placement partners and ECU MoC students, who have contributed their perspectives from a range of educational settings. Their experiences have proven invaluable in navigating challenges and devising successful strategies for resolution.

Your collaboration plays a vital role in our efforts to provide an environment conducive to our students' growth and learning, while also contributing to the overall success of your school.

Please feel free to reach out at any time if you have further questions or concerns not covered in this document.

We again extend our heartfelt appreciation for your partnership and support. We look forward to the journey ahead as we work together to create positive change.

**With warm regards,
The ECU MoC Placement Team**



*For clarity, the term "student" is used within this document to refer to ECU placement students. Students within your school are referred to as children or clients.

Past placement success

We are delighted to have the opportunity to share this heartwarming feedback, which serves as a testament to the positive impact our students have made in previous school placements.

(Please note: Xylon and his mother have granted full permission to disclose his full name.)

12th August 2023

Dear Georgina [ECU MoC Course Coordinator],

I am writing to you regarding somebody who helped me a lot throughout year 6, Joyce, a placement student from the Master of Counselling course you facilitate. Joyce was doing placement at my primary school 3 days a week and I saw her on one of those days. Before I started seeing her, I was faced with somebody who would make my school days very miserable, I didn't like going. I dreaded every day. I would breakdown and feel very anxious every morning. Joyce helped me cope, she taught me breathing techniques and to think about the situation deeper, dissecting the problem together by letting me talk. She would then be paraphrasing the situation back to me allowing me to look at it from a different perspective. I started to overcome the issues.

She helped me build courage. She taught me gentle approaches and how to get my words out when speaking to mum or others without there being tears or a problem. Joyce came in with activities like colouring, crafts and my favourite being UNO, she never forced me to talk and would never tell others what is shared with her. It was my safe space when I was finding the day a bit hard. She told me a lot about herself and her family and was always welcoming and warm. I liked talking to her about my problems because she always had a solution.

Hanging out with Joyce was the best thing about my Monday mornings. Knowing I would see her on the first day of the week made it easier to come to school. Joyce was an amazing person to be around, her spirit was so uplifting, without her I would've hated my last year of primary school and would have never learnt to talk to people about how I was feeling. Joyce was easy to talk to because she was never in a rush and always had the patience to listen even when I couldn't explain what I wanted to say. I felt very heard and understood in at our visits.

Before Joyce left, she gave me a gift, the gift had ingredients to a special food she showed me, and it made me warm to know that she remembered because we had shared that video in one of our first visits together. She also gave me a diary for me to put happy memories in. Joyce was a wonderful lady to talk to and I enjoyed our sessions together so much she made a massive difference to my last year at primary school. I will never forget how much she helped me and all the tricks she showed me they will be tools I will use for the rest of my life.

Please tell Joyce thank you again for the support and understanding she gave me. I miss our sessions and appreciate her so much. You will be an amazing counsellor and your future patients will be so lucky to have you.

From
Xylon Reutens

ECU MoC placement requirements

The ECU MoC course holds accreditation with the Australian Counselling Association (ACA). As part of accreditation requirements, ECU mandates that students dedicate a minimum of 220 total hours to their placement, encompassing a minimum of 60 client contact hours and 16 hours of clinical supervision.

The 220-hour requirement typically translates to 2 weekdays over 16 weeks.

Given the potential influence of school holidays on this schedule, students may need to consider extending their placement duration or dedicating time to training, research, or other non-client activities from their homes during these times. Approval from their supervisor is imperative for implementing these adjustments.

The 60+ client contact hours can encompass different therapeutic interactions with clients. We classify these interactions as follows:

Category	A	One-on-one counselling sessions (facilitated by the student)
	B	Facilitation or co-facilitation of a group
	C	Direct observation of category A or B contact or supplementary therapeutic contact



Please note:

Students must have a minimum of 20 hours of 'Category A' and a maximum of 20 hours each of 'Category B' and 'Category C' client contact to meet placement requirements.



Supervision

Students require a minimum of one hour a week (16 hours in total) of clinical supervision. Supervisors must be registered with ACA or a similar professional body (e.g. PACFA, AASW, APAC) and have a minimum of 2 years' experience. In instances where supervision requirements cannot be met in-house, external supervision will be sourced by ECU.

For more information contact:
placement@studyonline.ecu.edu.au.

"I felt well supported by my internal supervisor and other wellbeing team members who were all available and accessible."

– COU6511 former student

"I loved my external supervisor; they were very supportive and caring. We worked really well together."

– COU6511 former student

In the event of a crisis, students are encouraged to reach out firstly to the principal/ wellbeing team/allocated on-site manager, however the ECU placement team and placement academic staff are also available to provide support where needed.

"In a crisis situation (twice during my placement) I had a chat with Connie [ECU's Placement Unit Coordinator] afterwards to debrief. I was very grateful to have that opportunity."

– COU6511 former student



Assessment requirements

We try to limit the administrative burden we place on your school but we may need your input on some requirements.

Assessment 1	A learning agreement (learning plan) that students discuss with their supervisor(s).
Assessment 2	A student-led assignment that should not require your time or resources.
Assessment 3	An evaluation of the student's counselling skills.

In the case of an external clinical supervisor, they may not be able to comment on every aspect of performance. In this case, we recommend the administrative supervisor assess and comment on the aspects on which they feel able, then pass the form to the clinical supervisor to complete.

Students are required to complete a "log of hours" spreadsheet (similar to a timesheet) throughout and have it signed off at the end of their placement. The administrative and external clinical supervisors may need to liaise to confirm these hours are correct.

Informed consent

Counsellors are required to obtain informed consent from their clients before they undertake therapeutic services. In the case of children, this consent should be gained from both children and their parents*.

Parents

Some schools opt to engage with parents to acquire their consent, which can involve either (i) granting explicit permission for a child to engage with the counsellor or (ii) allowing parents to opt out of their child receiving counselling services. This consent might be attributed to a specified counsellor, or it could be extended to "the counsellor" or broader wellbeing team.

Should the granted permission be linked to an individual other than the current placement student, it becomes necessary for the school to reconnect with parents to affirm consent. In instances where the school has not secured this consent, the student counsellor assumes responsibility for contacting parents to obtain the requisite permission. We recommend that you ideally identify children who would benefit from counselling in advance of the student counsellor commencing placement so that the counsellor can start to work with the child as soon as possible.

Children

All parents have the right to consent (or refuse to consent) to counselling. In the case of separated or divorced parents, the student counsellor may require your assistance in establishing which parent/s have legal custody of the child.

While children who do not fall under the classification of "mature minors" might not be legally obligated to provide informed consent for counselling, adhering to best practices involves obtaining their consent at a level appropriate for their age. We therefore encourage our students to acquire consent through written or verbal means. We strongly advise against children being referred for counselling by their parents or teachers without their awareness or consent. This principle underscores the importance of respecting a child's autonomy and involvement in the decision-making process regarding counselling services.



*Recognising that not all children are cared for by parents, this term will be used to refer to all types of guardians/carers.

Confidentiality

In the field of counselling, confidentiality is a fundamental ethical principle that helps establish trust and create a safe space for clients to share their thoughts and feelings.

Counsellors are bound by ethical guidelines to respect and maintain the confidentiality of the information shared by their clients during sessions, even in the context of child and adolescent counselling. This means that counsellors are expected to keep the content of counselling sessions confidential and not disclose it to third parties, including parents or teachers, without the explicit consent of the client.

However, there are certain situations in which a counsellor may be ethically and legally obligated to breach confidentiality and share information with parents or relevant authorities. These situations typically involve concerns about the safety and wellbeing of the client or others.

For example:

Harm to self or others

If a counsellor believes that a client poses a serious risk of harm to themselves or others, they have a duty to inform appropriate authorities to ensure the safety of the client and others.

Child abuse or neglect

In most states, counsellors are mandated reporters, which means they may be legally required to report suspected cases of child abuse or neglect to the relevant child protective services agency.

Legal or court orders

In some cases, a court order may require a counsellor to disclose information from counselling sessions.

The laws around mandatory reporting are different in each state/territory and are beyond the scope of this document. Students should seek appropriate guidance and training around mandatory reporting at the start of their placement and we appreciate your expertise, support and assistance.

Our students are taught to communicate the boundaries of confidentiality clearly to clients, including children and adolescents, at the outset of the counselling relationship. This helps clients and their parents understand when and why confidentiality might be breached.

Ultimately, the decision to share information with parents or teachers should be made carefully and ethically, with the client's best interests and wellbeing as the primary concern. Our students are encouraged to consult with their supervisors and our placement staff if they are uncertain about how to handle a particular situation involving confidentiality, mandatory reporting, and parental involvement.

Creating a safe space

– the counselling environment

Creating a comfortable and confidential environment for counselling sessions is of utmost importance.

In an ideal situation this would entail a dedicated counselling room with a range of art, craft and play materials, however we acknowledge that resource and funding limitations prevent many schools from establishing such a setup.

Privacy, however, is a critical aspect, ensuring that clients can speak without the risk of being overheard or observed by others while engaging with the counsellor. Clients might feel uneasy about seeking counselling or expressing their emotions during sessions without such privacy. We have unfortunately had negative experiences in this respect, with one past student providing the following feedback:

“I had to do counselling sessions in the school library sometimes. On one occasion the library staff overheard what a client said and were laughing about it.”

– COU5422 former student

In instances where a dedicated counselling room is unavailable, alternative options such as unused classrooms (though associated with learning-related anxieties), meeting rooms, or the school psychologist's office can be considered.

We kindly request your cooperation in permitting student counsellors to reserve these spaces and in reinforcing to staff the importance of refraining from entering during sessions.



Case notes

Taking thorough case notes and storing them appropriately is essential for effective counselling.

Students use these notes to customise counselling for each student, making informed treatment changes, enhancing supervisory sessions, recording informed consent and ensuring ethical and legal compliance. It is important that access to counselling case notes is managed in accordance with the ACA ethics code.

Client documentation may be stored as hard-copy documentation or within the school's information technology system. While all client documentation should be kept safely and securely, case notes (records of session content and discussion) require enhanced security. If hard-copy case notes are maintained, they should be locked away and only the principal/deputy principal should have the key. If they are stored within the school's information technology system, only senior management (principal/deputy principal) should have access rights.

When agreeing to host a placement student, schools agree to uphold these parameters and give access to senior management only in specific, agreed circumstances.



Thank you

We sincerely appreciate your collaboration in providing our Master of Counselling (MoC) students with an invaluable opportunity for growth and learning within your school community.

Your support directly contributes to their development as competent and compassionate future counsellors.

Should you have any inquiries concerning the placement process, student-related matters, or general placement queries, please do not hesitate to contact our dedicated Placement Team at:

placement@studyonline.ecu.edu.au

Alternatively, you can reach out to your designated placement contact, with whom you have established a rapport.

For matters pertaining to unit coordination and academic assessment, please feel free to contact our Unit Coordinator Connie Richardson, at **connie.richardson@ecu.edu.au**.