

The School Counsellor and the Use of Virtual Tools, Applications, and Platforms in the delivery School Counselling Programs and Services

B.C.S.C.A. Position Statement – April 1, 2020

School counsellors are encouraged to take advantage of the wealth of available virtual tools, applications, and platforms that provide opportunities to share information and counsel/advise students. These apps and platforms should be effective in reducing barriers to access, and maximizing student success in schools, communities, and their families. Ideally, these virtual tools offer a way to respond in times of crisis and provide access to short-term interventions until the student is able to be connected with appropriate and available community resources.

School counsellors, who offer programs and services, including 1-on-1 and group counselling support in a virtual setting, do so with the same professional standards and adherence to ethics¹ as school counsellors working in face-to-face educational settings. School Counsellors will be mindful to gain INFORMED CONSENT from the student before initiating a virtual helping relationship and the CONSENT of parents for children 12 and under. School Counsellors acknowledge that their work in the virtual world has unique concerns that must be addressed before working with a student. School counsellors will work collaboratively with all stakeholders to ensure equity, access, and success of all students when delivering school counselling programs and services within a virtual environment.

A School Counsellors, when working with students in a virtual setting should:

- *Adhere to the same ethical guidelines in a virtual setting as school counsellors in a face-to-face setting*
- *Recognize and acknowledge the challenges and limitations of virtual school counselling*
- *Implement procedures for students to follow in both emergency and nonemergency situations when the school counsellor is not available*
- *Recognize and mitigate the limitation of virtual school counsellor confidentiality, which may include unintended viewers or recipients*
- *Inform both the student of the benefits and limitations of virtual counseling*

*The school counsellor will advocate for the access to and use of virtual tools, applications and platforms, **when necessary and appropriate**, to address a student need while considering and respecting contextual factors (i.e. community characteristics, pandemics, geographical, and*

¹ <https://www.bcschoolcounsellor.com/legal-ethical-guidelines>

school/district/ministry/government policies). A collaborative discussion between the school counsellor and supervisors can ensure the effective, efficient deployment of the appropriate tools, applications and platforms.

Current Context: COVID-19, March-April 2020

Effective March 26, the government of BC has issued “A new ministerial order under the Freedom of FOIPPA [enabling] the broader use of communications tools for health-care workers and other public-sector staff who are responding to the COVID-19 state of emergency.”² This new Ministerial Order³ relaxes the rules regarding the use of online platforms and tools that MAY store personal information OUTSIDE Canada . This change is NOT a PERMANENT change to FOIPPA, as noted in the [Government of BC Press Release](#) issued Sunday, March 29, 2020 4:40 PM.

In consideration of how this change could impact a school counsellor’s advocacy for, and the use of various virtual tools, applications and platforms, the specific part of this order that COULD relate to the use of online platforms are as follows:

2a. ... tools or applications are being used to support and maintain the operation of programs or activities of the public body or public bodies,

AND

4. For the purposes of this order “third-party tools and applications” ... used to enable communication or collaboration between individuals.

² <https://news.gov.bc.ca/releases/2020CITZ0005-000588>

³ https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/services-policies-for-government/information-management-technology/information-privacy/resources/ministerial_order_085_respecting_disclosures_during_covid-19_emergency_march_2020_pdf.pdf