



"I feel more confident and kind of less scared."

Young person who received Place2Be's support

Remote Counselling in Schools: When, where and how it works

Early access to mental health support is crucial for children and young people, so that their problems don't grow with them. Whilst in-person mental health support should be considered a gold-standard, remote counselling offers an alternative approach, overcoming barriers to accessibility, especially in rural areas.

WHY IS REMOTE COUNSELLING NECESSARY?

Whilst most children and young people accessing counselling will do so by sitting in a room with a counsellor, there are some scenarios where this isn't possible, convenient or comfortable. This can be for many reasons, including:

Recruitment difficulties

A national shortage of qualified child/young person counsellors means it can sometimes be difficult to recruit someone locally.

Shrinking budgets

Schools are being asked to do more with less. A remote service can offer cost-efficiencies for schools, making mental health support available to more children.

Tight-knit communities

Where schools are the centre of very small and connected communities, a remote counsellor who comes from outside of the area can provide an extra layer of confidentiality.

School building closures

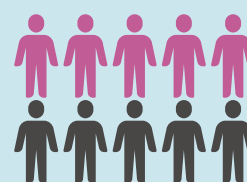
Remote counselling can continue when buildings are closed, for example during holidays.

Non-attendance

Children and young people who are struggling to attend school are not excluded from remote health services.

School space

Many schools tell us they struggle to find the physical space and materials to dedicate to a permanent service based in their school, but can spare a different private space for children to login to an online session from.



50%

of children and young people with lifetime mental health problems first experience symptoms by the age of 14. Ensuring young people from all parts of Scotland have accessible mental health services is key to tackling this.



**For more information, please email:
scotland@place2be.org.uk**

WHAT WE DID

Over a three-year period we worked with the communities of 17 schools in the Scottish Highlands, providing a remote counselling service for children aged 10-18. We worked with 60 children and young people in 634 counselling sessions.

Schools made referrals to our two practitioners who carried out mental health assessments and subsequent counselling sessions using Google Meet. Sessions made use of creative methods and online tools such as interactive whiteboards, online games, and role-playing resources.

The schools each appointed a key link person who managed the service from within the school. This included supporting the children to attend the sessions by providing a private room and computer, as well as support before and after the sessions.

Outcomes for this service were comparable with outcomes for our in-person service delivery in over 600 schools across Scotland, England and Wales.

In other projects...

We have also offered remote counselling to meet the needs of pupils struggling to attend school due to experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance; and to continue to support them in school holiday periods where there is no access to an appropriate physical space.



"We accessed Place2Be via the school almost immediately [for my granddaughter]... It took a while for her to open up, of course, but in the end, she would come home and discuss with us bits she wanted to share.

I am so grateful that we didn't have to wait and wait to start getting help for my granddaughter, it has made so much difference to her. I really believe, if she had had to wait all that time to get help that she would be in a very different place to where she is now. I am sure she would not have progressed nearly as well as she has, I think the delay would have caused her more damage. Place2Be saved that from happening, for which I will be eternally grateful."

Guardian of a young person who accessed remote counselling

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WHAT WE LEARNED

Visibility

School communities and local children and young people told us that it was important for the service to be introduced properly, such as by personal introductions from the counsellors via videos.

Services may take longer to become established than in face-to-face delivery; however visibility can be maintained by using creative methods such as video introductions or virtual homepages.

Creative approaches

Translating the creative approaches required to work therapeutically with children can be achieved in the online world. We used online games, sand trays, art work and role-playing resources to help individuals express their thoughts and feelings in a way that worked for them.

Multi-agency working

Building relationships with other agencies such as CAMHS, social work, schools, and educational psychology was even more important than usual due to there being fewer local services in these rural areas.

School partnerships

Excellent communication and teamwork with the schools was key to ensure safeguarding, support session attendance, implement GIRFEC, and properly conduct mental health assessments and measures.

Rural schools

The model has particular benefits for rural schools who may be more likely to have tight-knit communities, recruitment difficulties, low school rolls and space, and low budgets.

We found that...

Remote counselling can be just as effective and safe as in-person support for this age group. However, it's crucial to use creative approaches and have strong delivery partners on the ground.

"I have found dealing with [the counsellor] at Place2Be a very positive experience. There is always a prompt response to referrals. The service has been so beneficial to our senior pupils who have really connected with having someone "neutral" to talk to....and they are keen to attend their sessions. Confidentiality is paramount but any safeguarding issues are highlighted straight away."

Primary Head Teacher

