

Counseling Handbook

St. John's College High School



Opening Minds • Unlocking Talents • Building Leaders

2019-2020

Welcome

High school brings exciting and challenging changes to a young person's life and their family. In the Counseling Center, our goal is to provide support and resources for students at every grade level and in every area of their lives.

We are committed to assisting with the academic, social, emotional and spiritual growth of every student. We strive to meet students at their level and to challenge them to reach greater heights. These goals are achieved through one-on-one meetings between counselor and student, classroom presentations to all students, group workshops and parent information events.

As counselors, we hope this handbook serves as a starting point for any questions you may have about your child's academic, social, emotional and college and career planning needs. We encourage you to reach out with any concerns or clarification you may need along the way.

Sincerely,

Julie H. Mitchell
Director of School Counseling

Role of the School Counselor

School counselors are certified, licensed educators who improve all student achievement by implementing a comprehensive school counseling program. We do this through data collection and analysis, which is aligned with the national standards governed by the American School Counselor Association.

Counselors help students:

- apply academic achievement strategies
- manage emotions and apply interpersonal skills
- plan for postsecondary options (higher education, military, work force)

Counselors provide:

- individual student planning and goal setting
- small group meetings
- classroom lessons
- short-term counseling
- referrals for long-term support
- collaboration with families/teachers/administrators/community for student success
- data analysis to identify student issues, needs and challenges

Confidentiality

A student's right to privacy and confidentiality is the basis for an effective counseling relationship. Confidentiality ensures that school counselors won't share students' conversations with anyone else unless the student authorizes us to do so. The one clause to our confidentiality agreement is when a student expresses clear and present danger to themselves or someone else.

Requesting a Meeting

Students can schedule appointments with counselors by sending an email or Canvas request. We encourage students to visit before or after school, during homeroom or during a lunch period. Unless it is an emergency, students should refrain from dropping by the Counseling Center between classes in order to avoid being late to class.

To ensure the needs of our parents/guardians are met, we recommend scheduling a meeting or phone call in advance.

Julie Mitchell	9th Grade	(202) 363-2316 x 1012 / jmitchell@stjohnschs.org
Steve Schwartz	10th Grade	(202) 363-2316 x 1013 / sschwartz@stjohnschs.org
Michelle McIntosh-Peters	11th Grade	(202) 363-2316 x 1014 / michellem@stjohnschs.org
Rosemary Martin	12th Grade (A - Henry)	(202) 363-2316 x 1097 / rmartin@stjohnschs.org
Fatmata Koroma	12th Grade (Henson-Oluremi)	(202) 363-2316 x 1007 / fkoroma@stjohnschs.org
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Anna Garland	Scholars Grades 9-12	(202) 363-2316 x 1095 / agarland@stjohnschs.org

For concerns regarding a specific course, such as questions about grading or information about homework, the course teacher is recommended as the first point of contact.

Role of the Student

St. John's encourages all students to be responsible for their own learning and to actively engage in the educational process. Parents, teachers and friends may guide and direct the learning process, but real academic achievement is not possible if a student is not actively involved in his/her learning.

The three pre-requisites for academic success are:

1. Regular and prompt attendance
2. Active participation in class
3. Completion of assigned homework
4. Clear and direct communication with each teacher

Students must come to class fully prepared and be ready, willing and able to participate in the lessons of the day. Furthermore, students must assist in maintaining a learning environment of respect and freedom from distraction by refraining from disruptive conduct.

If a student misses class due to illness, a school-related sporting event or another serious circumstance, the student is responsible for:

1. Checking Canvas to review all course materials that were covered in class.
2. Communicating with the teacher to verify missed assignments and deadlines.
3. Returning to school prepared to participate in class or requesting a meeting with the teacher to understand content that was missed.

Students must contact their school counselor or the academic support specialist if they are absent from school for more than three days and require assistance scheduling their missed assignments and tests.

Course Selection Process

Course registration provides an opportunity for students to select their courses for the next academic year. Counselors and administrators will conduct a preregistration meeting with students every spring to discuss qualifications and options that align with each student's post-secondary interests.

It is assumed that the students have discussed their choices with their parents before registering online with PowerSchool. If you or your student has any questions about course sequencing or how to qualify for Honors or AP courses, please contact your student's grade-level counselor.

- Seniors are required to complete at least 6.0 credits.
- Juniors and sophomores are required to complete at least 6.5 credits each school year.
- Freshmen are required to complete 7.0 credits.

Honors and Advanced Placement Courses

Advanced level courses, intended to meet the needs of academically gifted students, are offered in most disciplines. Students wishing to register for Honors or AP classes must have a cumulative 3.0 grade point average and the approval of the current teacher in the department. Students who enroll in AP classes are encouraged to take the AP exam in May. AP courses will also involve substantial summer assignments.

Prerequisites for specific Honors and AP courses can be found in our course catalog on our website:

<https://www.stjohnschs.org/academics/overview>

Graduation Requirements

In order to obtain a diploma from St. John's, students must have a minimum of 26 Carnegie units (credits). Graduation requirements for students who enter St. John's in grades 10 or 11 will be evaluated by the principal.

Requirements for all students:

- Religion 4 years
- English 4 years
- Mathematics 4 years
- Science 3 years
- Social Studies 3 years
- Modern Languages 2 years

College and Career Development

At St. John's, students and parents have a number of resources available to help simplify the complex college application process. Students and parents are given access to Naviance, a web-based resource that contains information about colleges and scholarships.

Our college counselors also host evening events for parents covering a wide range of topics in the ever-changing world of college admissions, including applications, recommendations, financial aid and scholarships.

Whether our students need assistance writing an essay, preparing for an interview or deciding what college or university to ultimately attend, we are here to help.

Please visit our web page for more information:

<https://www.stjohnschs.org/academics/college-counseling>

Academic Accommodations

St. John's does not recognize IEP or 504 plans as a substitute for a neuropsychological educational evaluation. Students intending to use academic accommodations must have a current (within three years) evaluation on file with their counselor.

St. John's offers various classroom and testing accommodations when a student has been diagnosed with a specific learning disability following a professional psycho-educational examination.

Accommodations offered at St. John's include:

- Extra time on assessments (50% or 100%)
- Preferential seating
- Ability to write directly on exams
- Scribe for exams
- Reader/eReader for exams (based on availability)
- Use of computer to type essays and written assessments
- Assistance with class notes
- Use of calculator on exams

Although teachers are provided with a list of accommodations for each student who needs them, it is also essential for students to actively communicate with their teachers about their needs in advance.

Best Practice: Students should develop the habit of self-advocating for their accommodations at least 24 hours prior to any assessment.

Counselors meet individually with students who require classroom accommodations in the first week of school and on an as-needed basis to ensure student needs are met.

Common Learning Disabilities and Resources:

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/autism-learning-disabilities/learning-disabilities-and-disorders.htm>

Academic Support Services

Our Academic Support Center offers a collaborative learning environment that empowers students to become active and independent learners.

Academic support is available to all students Monday-Friday from 7:30am-4:00pm and is located in room 200. Please contact our academic support specialist, Mr. Jackson Ellis, by stopping by or reaching him at jellis@stjohnschs.org.

Students have access to:

- 1v1 sessions with our academic support specialist.
- Math teachers during all lunch periods.
- Peer tutors.
- Professional Tutors (after school).

The Writing Center offers cross-curricular support for a variety of writing assignments. Students can sign up for tutoring sessions with an English teacher to help with:

- Research papers
- Essays
- Creative writing
- Speeches

Academic Success Strategies for Students:

1. Build a relationship with your teachers. They are here to help you learn.
2. Ask for help and utilize resources outside the classroom when you need it.
3. Do your homework on time!
4. Make a plan and get organized.
5. Study with a friend – teaching someone else helps you memorize information.

Helpful Apps:

- EverNote – one-stop shop for organization: you can make to-do lists, write notes, take pictures, save PDFs and save online links.
- Notability – easy note-taking and annotation.
- Microsoft OneNote – great for note-taking: type, drag and drop images, highlight and create checklists.

Technology

St. John's believes that technology is an essential component of education in a 21st century society. St. John's was one of the first schools in the area to implement a school-wide 1:1 iPad program. The program creates an engaging and motivating learning environment that supports both personalized and student-centered learning.

All new students will receive a mandatory 90-minute training session designed to ensure each student is familiar with the technology, understands SJC's technology policies and is ready to learn on the first day of school.

Canvas

All faculty members use Canvas, a learning management system that allows students to submit homework assignments, take notes, watch digital lessons, make flashcards, participate in classroom exercises and review teacher presentations from any location.

Best Practice: We encourage all parents to create Canvas accounts, so they can monitor course announcements and assignments. Parents will receive login information when their student arrives for orientation.

PowerSchool

PowerSchool is St. John's Student Information System that covers administrative needs such as scheduling, attendance, data management, emergency/medical and health management, registration and more.

St. John's faculty uses PowerSchool as our gradebook, giving students and parents access to academic progress throughout the year.

Common FAQs:

- Like Canvas, parents will receive a parent access ID and password that is linked to their child. We recommend all parents create an account so they can monitor grades in advance of marking periods.
- **We recommend checking PowerSchool once every two weeks. Why?**
Teachers are busy with classroom instruction, 1v1 meetings and grading, so updates are scheduled on a bi-weekly basis throughout the year.
- **Absent?**
When a student is absent from class, teachers may assign “zeros” as placeholders until the student has submitted the assignment or completed the assessment. This will have a dramatic impact on the grade that is shown in PowerSchool, but will be adjusted as soon as the assignment is complete.
- **My student did poorly on an assignment. How can I help?**
Ask your student to show you the assignment that was submitted on Canvas. Teachers often leave comments to offer insights and considerations for improvement. Encourage your student to make an appointment with their teacher so they understand how to improve.

Best Practice: Monitor the time your child spends “doing homework.” Start by building a routine when they get home from school by asking how much time your child needs to complete all of their assignments (30 minutes / 1 hour). Once that time has elapsed, check for completion.

Negotiating Technology with your Child (links to more resources at the bottom of this article):

<http://www.guardingkids.com/2013/03/negotiating-technology-with-your-child.html>

Learning with Technology

<https://www.common sense media.org/learning-with-technology/should-i-be-concerned-about-my-teens-constant-multitasking-during-homework>

For more information about our educational technology program, please visit our website:

<https://www.stjohnschs.org/academics/educational-technology>

Counseling Services and Resources

Our philosophy is to provide students with short-term, solution-focused counseling to address immediate concerns. When needed, counselors may refer students and their families to resources within our community for more appropriate, long-term care.

Student Self-Care Toolkit

This website is meant to help students develop and practice healthy living habits by focusing on nutrition, exercise, sleep, recreational activities, social relationships and more.

<https://classroommentalhealth.org/self-care/student/>

The following mental health disorders are common and treatable. If you think you are experiencing any of the symptoms associated with the following illnesses, please speak to a parent, counselor or trusted adult.

Symptoms of Distress:

<https://copingskillsforkids.com/does-my-child-need-more-help>

Anxiety

Anxiety is the number one mental health diagnosis for adolescents today, but it is also the most treatable.

Occasional anxiety is an expected part of life. You might feel anxious when faced with a problem at school, before taking a test or before making an important decision. However, anxiety disorders involve more than temporary worry or fear. For a person with an anxiety disorder, the anxiety does not go away and can worsen over time.

Some symptoms of anxiety may look or feel like:

- Restlessness or edginess
- Having difficulty concentrating; mind going blank
- Muscle tension
- Difficulty controlling feelings of worry
- Heart palpitations, sweaty palms, shortness of breath
- Feeling of being out of control

General Information:

<https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Anxiety-Disorders/Overview>

Calming Anxiety Activities:

<https://copingskillsforkids.com/calming-anxiety/>

Depression

Being a teenager is really tough! It is perfectly normal to have a bad day and feel sad, irritable or hopeless. However, if feelings persist for most of the day, nearly every day for at least two weeks, you may be suffering from depression.

Depression is a serious but common mood disorder. If any of the following symptoms sound familiar, talk to your parent(s) right away:

- Persistent sad, anxious or “empty” mood
- Feelings of guilt, worthlessness or helplessness
- Loss of interest or pleasure in hobbies and activities you used to enjoy
- Decreased energy or fatigue
- Difficulty concentrating, remembering or making decisions
- Difficulty sleeping, early-morning awakening or oversleeping
- Appetite and/or weight changes
- Thoughts of death or suicide, or suicide attempts
- Aches, pains, headaches, cramps or digestive problems without a clear physical cause that do not ease with treatment

General Information:

<https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Depression>

Guide to Coping with Depression:

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/depression/teenagers-guide-to-depression.htm/>

Eating Disorders

There is a commonly held misconception that eating disorders are a lifestyle choice. Eating disorders are actually serious and often fatal illnesses related to thoughts and emotions that cause severe disturbances in people’s eating behaviors. Preoccupation with food, body weight and shape may also signal an eating disorder.

Common eating disorders include anorexia nervosa, bulimia nervosa and binge-eating. Symptoms may include the following:

- Restrictive eating
- Fear of certain foods and weight-gain

- Distorted body-image
- Purging; inflamed or persistent sore throat
- Intestinal distress and irritation
- Severe dehydration
- Consuming large amounts of food
- Feeling hungry even when you are full
- Feeling guilty, distressed or ashamed when eating

Help and Support:

<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/help-support>

Toolkit for Parents:

<https://www.nationaleatingdisorders.org/sites/default/files/Toolkits/ParentToolkit.pdf>

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

If you have experienced an extremely stressful or disturbing event that's left you feeling helpless and emotionally out of control, you may have been traumatized. Psychological trauma can leave you struggling with distressing emotions and memories and anxiety that won't go away. It can also leave you feeling numb, disconnected and unable to trust other people. Some causes of PTSD include:

- An unstable or unsafe environment
- Separation from a parent
- Serious illness
- Intrusive medical procedures
- Sexual, physical or verbal abuse
- Domestic violence
- Neglect

Healing from Trauma:

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/ptsd-trauma/coping-with-emotional-and-psychological-trauma.htm>

Crisis Protocols and Procedures

All school personnel are mandated reporters (faculty, staff, counselors, administrators, coaches, bus drivers, etc.) and are legally required to report any suspicion of abuse, neglect, self-harm or suicidal ideations and behaviors.

The following situations are considered emergencies and are therefore exceptions to our confidentiality agreement.

Child Protective Services

If you suspect a child is in immediate danger, call 911. All other suspicions of abuse or neglect must be reported through the Hotline at 202-671-SAFE (7233).

Every child has the right to be safe. District law defines child abuse as:

- Putting a child in a dangerous situation.
- Hurting a child on purpose.
- Adult sexual exploitation or contact with a child.
- Actions of a parent (or caregiver) that cause mental or emotional harm to a child.

Finding a CFSA Child Protective Services social worker at your door raises many feelings, questions and concerns. Information will help you understand what to expect when your family is going through a child welfare investigation. For more information, please visit the Child and Family Services website:

<https://cfsa.dc.gov/page/when-child-welfare-investigates-your-family>

Self-Harm

Hurting yourself—or thinking about hurting yourself—is a sign of emotional distress. Self-harm is not a mental illness, but a behavior that indicates a lack of coping skills.

While self-injury may bring a momentary sense of calm and a release of tension, it's usually followed by guilt, shame and the return of painful emotions. Although life-threatening injuries are usually not intended, with self-injury comes the possibility of more serious and even fatal self-aggressive actions.

If you have a friend or loved one who is self-injuring, you may be shocked and scared. Take all talk of self-injury seriously. Although you might feel that you are betraying a confidence, self-injury is too big a problem to ignore or to deal with alone.

Here are some ways to help:

- Your child: You can start by consulting your pediatrician or other health care provider who can provide an initial evaluation or a referral to a mental health professional. Express your concern, but don't yell at your child or make threats or accusations.
- Preteen or teenage friend: Suggest that your friend talk to parents, a teacher, a school counselor or another trusted adult.

General Information:

<https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Related-Conditions/Self-harm>

Symptoms and Causes:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/self-injury/symptoms-causes/syc-20350950>

Suicide

If you or someone you know is talking about ending their life, IMMEDIATELY call 911 or [The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 800-273-TALK (8255).

A suicidal person may not ask for help, but that doesn't mean that help isn't wanted. People who take their lives don't want to die – they just want to stop hurting.

Suicide prevention starts with recognizing the warning signs and taking them seriously:

- Threats or comments about killing themselves, also known as suicidal ideation, can begin with seemingly harmless thoughts such as “I wish I wasn't here” but can become more overt and dangerous.
- Increased alcohol and drug use.
- Aggressive behavior.
- Social withdrawal from friends, family and the community.
- Dramatic mood swings.
- Talking, writing or thinking about death.
- Impulsive or reckless behavior.

Youth Prevention:

<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/youth/>

<https://www.helpguide.org/articles/suicide-prevention/suicide-prevention.htm>

General Information:

<https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Mental-Health-Conditions/Related-Conditions/Suicide>

School Re-entry Policy

Although rare, there may be times when a student takes a leave of absence (LOA) to receive intensive treatment for medical or psychological reasons. St. John's reserves the right to make the final determination about whether the student is ready to re-enter school.

Upon the completion of a LOA and before returning to classes, the student and their family must provide the school with the following information and meet the following conditions:

- The student, with his or her family, must attend a re-entry meeting with an administrator and the student's school counselor.
- The school and family will create a mutually agreed upon re-entry plan, outlining the supports to be put in place for the student. This plan may include conditions for continued enrollment at the school and may be re-evaluated at any time.
- The family must provide documentation from the treatment facility that the student is medically or emotionally stable and capable of functioning fully in an academic, non-therapeutic school environment.
- The family must provide a discharge plan from the treatment facility describing the services the student and his or her family have agreed to receive on an outpatient basis.
- The family must provide signed Release of Information forms, authorizing the school and counselor to speak with outpatient providers who are coordinating and providing care for the student.

Referrals: Psychiatrists, Psychologists and Treatment Centers

We always recommend starting with your family's pediatrician, as they can help refer you to specialists in-network.

The Counseling Center maintains a comprehensive and current list of local professionals who are trained with a skillset to meet your mental health needs. Please feel free to ask your grade-level counselor for a referral list.

Additionally, [Psychology Today](#) can be filtered to help you find a therapist, psychiatrist, treatment center and support group in your area.

A [parent's guide to getting good care](#) is also available.

- **Psychiatrist** – Doctors who specialize in the diagnosis and treatment of mental or psychiatric illnesses. They have medical training and are licensed to prescribe medication. They are also trained in psychotherapy, or 'talk' therapy, which aims to change a person's behaviors or thought patterns.
- **Psychologist** – Experts in the field of psychology who have a doctoral degree (PhD or PsyD). They study the human mind and human behavior and are also trained in counseling, psychotherapy and psychological testing, which can help uncover emotional problems.

Conduct

All members of the St. John's community are to treat each other with dignity and respect. No form of harassment will be tolerated. Harassment is defined as behavior towards another, which is unwelcome and harmful.

Forms of harassment include verbal/written remarks or threats, physical contact, gestures, gossip, phone calls, email, text messages and harassment on any social media platform.

Effective discipline is a cooperative effort among students, their families, administrators, teachers and other staff members. The school will make every effort to maintain student confidentiality and will involve parents by notifying them of violations and arranging meetings with the administration when appropriate and necessary.

Bullying, Cyberbullying and Social Media

Bullying is the repeated and unwanted use by one or more students of a written, verbal, or electronic expression, or a physical act or gesture, or any combination thereof, directed at another student that:

- causes physical or emotional harm.
- places another student in reasonable fear of harm to him/herself or damage to his/her property.
- creates a hostile environment at school.
- infringes on the rights of another student at school.
- materially and substantially disrupts the education process or the orderly operation of the school.

By way of example only, bullying may involve, but is not limited to:

- unwanted teasing
- threatening
- intimidating
- stalking
- cyberstalking
- physical violence
- theft
- sexual, religious, racial or any other type of harassment
- public humiliation
- destruction of school or personal property
- social exclusion, including incitement and/or coercion
- rumor or spreading of falsehoods

Cyberbullying

Cyberbullying is repeated and unwanted harassment through the use of technology or any electronic communication, which includes, but is not limited, to any transfer of signs, signals, writing, images, sounds, data or intelligence of any nature. Cyberbullying includes:

- the creation of a web page or blog in which the creator assumes the identity of another person.
- impersonating another person as author of posted content or messages.
- if the creation or impersonation creates any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying.
- the distribution by electronic means of a communication to one or more persons.
- the posting of material on an electronic medium that may be accessed by one or more persons.
- the distribution or posting of any of the conditions enumerated in the definition of bullying.

Common Sense Media is a resource for parents to help protect their child online, with tips and strategies for intervention when necessary:

<https://www.common sense media.org/cyberbullying>

Digital Drama is the everyday tiffs and disputes that occur among friends or acquaintances online or via text messages. Additional information about how to help your child avoid digital drama can be found here:

<https://www.common sense media.org/social-media/how-can-i-help-my-kid-avoid-digital-drama>

Social Media Use

How Can I Get My Children to Put Down Their Phone?

<https://www.common sense media.org/cellphone-parenting/how-can-i-get-my-kids-to-put-down-their-phones>

1. Help children find space for face-to-face conversations. Put phones down during key conversation times such as dinner or car rides.

2. Model the manners and behavior you want to see:
 - Avoid texting in the car.
 - Consider narrating your phone use (e.g., “I’m looking up directions”) so young children understand the utility of the device.
 - Make sure to excuse yourself if you have to interrupt a family moment to attend to your phone.
3. Charge your children’s phones in your room at night. Removing their phones can give them a needed break.
4. Establish consequences for problematic phone use. Consider instituting temporary time or location limits. Some wireless carriers offer parental controls that let you set daily phone-use limits, and some apps can disable your child’s phone when he or she hits a limit.

What should I teach my child about safe online behavior?

<https://www.common sense media.org/cyberbullying/what-should-i-teach-my-kid-about-safe-online-behavior>

1. Communicate appropriately – how would you feel if your teacher or grandparent read your comments?
2. Keep private things private – don’t share personal information, including passwords, home address, inappropriate images or gossip.
3. Respect others.
4. Don’t lie, steal or cheat – remember to give credit where credit is due.
5. Be an “upstander” – if someone you know is being targeted by a bully, stand up for that person. You would want them to do the same for you.
6. Report misbehavior – the Internet is a giant community, and you can help it be a nice place.
7. Think before you post, text, or share – Consider how you and others might feel after you’ve posted something. It’s not always easy to take back what you’ve said online, and your online behavior can create a lasting footprint.

The New Normal: Infographic on How Devices Affect Daily Life

<https://www.common sense media.org/sites/default/files/uploads/research/2019-new-normal-parents-teens-screens-and-sleep-united-states-infographic.pdf>