

## POLICY FOR ADVICE LINE, ADULT COUNSELLING, TELEPHONE COUNSELLING AND OUTREACH SERVICES

<b>Document Control Panel</b>			
File Reference Number		SER-POL-01	
File Name		Policy for Advice Line, Adult Counselling, Telephone Counselling and Outreach Services	
Owner		Head of Adult Services/Deputy CEO	
Approver		CEO	
<b>History</b>			
Date	Author's Name	Changes	Approved by Name
14/5/10	SG	Reformatting	
01/6/10	PS	Changed re confidentiality	PS
6/10/10	SG	Reformatting	
6/10/10	MR	Revision	
15/10/10	RSD	Revision	
21/10/10	CC	Editing	PS
13/01/11			Board of Trustees
10/02/12	PG	Revision	
14/08/13	LM/PG		PS
12/11/13			Board of Trustees
Next Review Date		09/2014	

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## **1 This policy arises from**

The Adoption Support Agencies (England) and Adoption Agencies (Miscellaneous Amendments) Regulations 2005, Regulations 13, 15 and the National Minimum Standards for Adoption, NMS 15

## **2 Introduction: Aims and Objectives**

2.1 The overall objectives of the PAC Advice Line, Adult Counselling, Telephone Counselling and Outreach Services are to provide specialist information, advice and resources on adoption and permanency issues and, through skilled and sensitive counselling, to help service users to:

- understand the full impact of adoption and other permanent placements on themselves and others affected by it
- apply this understanding to their relationships and other aspects of their lives
- grieve their losses occurring through adoption
- revalue themselves and their family connections
- develop an integrated and positive self-identity, and improve their self-esteem

2.2 As an adoption support agency, PAC is committed to providing through its Advice Line, Adult Counselling Service, Telephone Counselling and Outreach Counselling Service:

- free telephone advice, support and information for anyone affected by adoption and other permanent placements via the Advice Line
- face to face counselling for:
  - adopted and fostered adults
  - adoptive parents and foster carers and special guardians
  - birth parents and birth relatives
- therapeutic assessments of need
- consultations on adoption and other permanent placement issues with professionals (eg. social workers, therapists, health visitors, teachers, solicitors, children's guardians, mental health professionals, etc.)
- telephone counselling service (including via Skype): this service will provide one to one counselling support for up to six sessions through a Service Level Agreement arrangement; or privately to individuals who wish to pay. Ideally the first contact for a telephone counselling service should be face to face either at PAC or via Skype.
- publication and resources lists

### **3 Provision of Services**

- 3.1 PAC is committed to maintaining standards of excellence in the provision of adoption support through the recruitment, training and support of qualified, skilled and experienced counsellors and social workers who meet the requirements of their own registration body, i.e. the UKCP, BACP, BPS and HCPC, as well as having specialist experience of working with adoption and other permanent placement issues. PAC aims to maintain a balance of staff recruited from a variety of cultures and ethnicities.
- 3.2 As a pioneer in adoption support, PAC provides professional consultation on adoption issues, and therapeutic assessments of need for counselling for all parties to adoption, when commissioned to do so by the individuals themselves or by subscribing local authorities or other professionals such as Children's Guardians, solicitors or the courts.
- 3.3 Prospective service users will be made aware that they may be entitled to request an assessment of their needs for adoption support services from their local authority in accordance with the Adoption and Children Act 2002 and associated regulations.
- 3.4 PAC will ensure that, in order to comply with Regulation 13 (2005), adoption support services provided to any party to adoption are appropriate to their need, as assessed by the local authority or PAC counsellor, having taken into account their wishes and feelings, welfare and safety. These will be recorded on their file.
- 3.5 Where an assessment of need has been made, and PAC counselling and support services are not deemed to be suitable, the client will be informed accordingly and signposted to another agency or their local Social Services as appropriate. Reasons for not providing PAC services will be recorded, and the referrer notified if appropriate. Severe mental health or learning difficulties with communication problems must be assessed and a decision made as to the most appropriate service, should the short term counselling service offered by PAC not be appropriate to meet their needs.
- 3.6 PAC is committed to providing its Advice Line, Adult Counselling, Telephone Counselling and Outreach Services in a culturally sensitive way, paying due regard to the client's race, age, culture, gender, physical and mental ability, religion or belief and sexual orientation.
- 3.7 Where clients have particular needs such as counselling in a language other than English, or a physical disability or mild mental impairment that requires additional resources, PAC staff will liaise with the subscribing local authority to organise such resources as an interpreter, or transport/support for vulnerable clients.

- 3.8 Clients with visual, hearing or speech impairments can access the service, with input of specific resources on request. The subscribing local authority may be asked to fund or provide additional resources, as appropriate, if these have financial implications.
- 3.9 The Advice Line and Adult Counselling Services are based at PAC's offices in Kentish Town. The telephone counselling service can be undertaken at PAC offices or at the counsellor's home or premises. If this work is to be undertaken at a counsellor's home there must be suitable professional space for the counsellor to operate within. All counsellors undertaking Telephone Counselling must have been trained in the provision of this service.
- 3.10 Counsellors offering telephone counselling via Skype or the Internet must ensure they have the correct level of Firewall and security protection on the computer system to avoid compromising the service user or themselves. (Please refer to Skype policy and procedures).
- 3.11 In addition, to facilitate greater access for individual subscribing local authority residents to PAC adoption support services, a monthly Outreach Counselling Service is provided by a team of PAC trained counsellors and social workers.
- 3.12 PAC offices in Kentish Town, and venues arranged by the various local authorities for outreach counselling, are all wheelchair accessible. See also PAC Equal Opportunities Policy for access to PAC services.
- 3.13 Clients will be clearly informed of decisions made in relation to their service and given the opportunity to provide feedback to PAC both during the course of counselling and after it has ended. Young people's views on PAC counselling service provision should inform the Young People's development group.
- 3.14 Where PAC counselling services are commissioned by an agency, a written agreement will underpin this three-way working arrangement which will be subject to regular review. The focus will be the assessed needs of the client for adoption support, and due regard will be paid to the confidential nature of the work in all communications with the commissioning agency.

## **4 Confidentiality**

- 4.1 The content of counselling sessions will be kept confidential except in certain circumstances, such as in cases of current or historical child abuse disclosed by a service user, and then only in accordance with PAC's Safeguarding Policy and Procedures. Identifying details of the service user will be given to local authorities where the authority has commissioned the service. The service user will be asked and informed of this requirement. The content of the counselling sessions will still

remain confidential. Counselling cases may be referred to anonymously for specific training and supervision purposes.

- 4.2 Also, with the client's consent, where PAC provides an intermediary service, identifying details will need to be shared with the agency holding the adoption records in order to seek its views on making contact with the other party to the adoption. Non-identifying information may also then be passed to that party when a reunion is sought by the client.
- 4.3 All clients will be informed at their initial interview with a counsellor of PAC's policy on Confidentiality and its compliance with Data Protection legislation. If, after an assessment of need, the client is offered a counselling service, s/he will be asked to countersign an agreement that specifies PAC's commitment to maintaining confidentiality.
- 4.4 All PAC staff, sessional workers and volunteers are required to sign a 'Confidentiality' undertaking not to disclose any case information about clients that they may acquire through their contact with PAC, unless safeguarding issues arise. See PAC's Overarching policies and procedures, Section 10 Records, and Section 2 Safeguarding and Promoting Welfare.
- 4.5 All client records are securely stored in accordance with PAC's Overarching policies and procedures, Section 10 Records.

## **5 Monitoring of PAC Advice Line, Adult Counselling, Telephone Counselling and Outreach Services Provision**

- 5.1 PAC will consistently endeavour to improve the quality of its Advice Line, Adult Counselling, Telephone Counselling and Outreach Services provision to make it even more client-centred and effective. To this end, feedback is regularly sought from service users and subscribing authorities and taken into account when reviewing these services. A client feedback form will be used. Reports will be provided to the Board of Trustees on an annual basis.
- 5.2 All PAC counsellors will be provided with a copy of this policy and procedure to assist them in following best practice. The services will be monitored and evaluated at regular intervals, with an annual review of the provision to ensure that this is in accordance with prevailing legislation, regulations, guidance, standards and best practice.