

School Counsellor interview questions

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What to expect

Interviews for School Counsellor roles are usually run by a panel that includes the principal or a wellbeing coordinator, sometimes with a school psychologist or head of student services. Expect a mix of questions that test clinical judgement, knowledge of school-based processes, and your ability to work with teachers and families, not just your counselling technique in isolation.

- **Behavioural:** Questions about past experience building rapport with students, managing a caseload, or handling a difficult disclosure or conversation.
- **Scenario and judgement:** Hypothetical situations, such as a disclosure of harm or a student in crisis, used to test decision-making under pressure and understanding of duty of care.
- **Process and technical:** Questions about how you assess student needs, write intervention plans, and document case notes within school systems.
- **Safety and compliance:** Questions checking your understanding of mandatory reporting obligations, confidentiality limits and child safety standards.
- **Stakeholder and client-facing:** Questions about working with parents, teachers and external providers who may disagree with your recommendations or approach.

Most processes start with a phone or video screen focused on qualifications, registration and Working With Children Check status. The panel interview follows, opening with background and motivation questions before moving into scenario-based questions on crisis response and reporting. Some schools include a short written case study or ask you to talk through a de-identified case, and referee checks focused on child safety are standard before an offer is made.

1. Tell me about a time you worked with a student who was reluctant to engage in counselling. How did you build trust?

Why they ask

Tests your ability to establish rapport with students who may be guarded, defensive or unused to talking about their difficulties, a core part of one-on-one counselling work.

How to structure your answer

Use STAR: describe the situation and why the student was reluctant, the specific approach you took to build trust, and the outcome for the student's engagement and progress.

Example answer

"I was assigned a Year 9 student who'd been referred after repeated conflict with teachers but refused to talk in our first two sessions. Rather than pushing for disclosure, I spent early sessions on low-pressure activities and let him set the pace, checking in on things he was interested in outside school. By the fourth session he started raising issues at home that were affecting his behaviour in class. We built a simple support plan together, and his teachers reported fewer incidents over the following term. The key was not rushing the relationship before he was ready to open up."

2. A student discloses to you that they are being harmed at home. Walk me through what you would do.

Why they ask

Checks your understanding of duty of care and mandatory reporting requirements, and whether you can respond calmly and correctly in a high-stakes situation.

How to structure your answer

Judgement under pressure: outline your immediate response to the student, the reporting and escalation steps you'd follow, and how you'd balance the student's trust with your legal obligations.

Example answer

"My first priority is the student's immediate safety and making sure they feel heard, without promising confidentiality I can't legally offer. I'd explain clearly and calmly that I have to pass this information on to keep them safe, then follow the school's child protection policy, which usually means notifying the principal or designated child safety officer and lodging a mandatory report with the relevant authority. I'd document the disclosure accurately and factually in case notes as soon as possible afterwards, and stay involved with the student through follow-up sessions so they still have support through the process."

3. How do you assess a student's needs and decide on an intervention plan?

Why they ask

This is a core process question, since assessment and planning sit at the centre of the role alongside direct counselling.

How to structure your answer

Walk-through: describe your process step by step, from initial referral or observation through to assessment tools, plan development and review.

Example answer

"When a referral comes in, I start with an initial session to understand the presenting concern from the student's perspective, then gather context from teachers and, where appropriate, parents. I use structured assessment approaches to identify whether the concern is primarily emotional, behavioural, social or academic, and set specific, achievable goals with the student. The plan gets documented in the school's system, whether that's Compass or Sentral, with a review point built in, usually a few weeks out, so I can check whether the strategies are working or need adjusting."

4. How do you handle a situation where a parent disagrees with the support plan you've recommended for their child?

Why they ask

Tests stakeholder management skills and your ability to hold a professional position while keeping the relationship workable.

How to structure your answer

STAR, focused on the specific disagreement, your approach to the conversation, and the resolution or ongoing working relationship.

Example answer

"A parent once pushed back strongly on a plan that involved reducing their child's exam load temporarily to manage anxiety, worried it would affect grades. I listened to their concerns fully before explaining the evidence behind the recommendation and what we'd observed in sessions. I offered a compromise: a shorter trial period with a clear review date, and kept them updated between reviews. They came around once they saw their child's anxiety symptoms ease and grades stay steady. Keeping communication open and framing it as a shared goal, rather than a directive, made the difference."

5. What are your obligations around mandatory reporting and confidentiality in a school setting?

Why they ask

A direct knowledge check on legal and ethical obligations, which panels need to confirm before hiring for a role with this level of access to vulnerable students.

How to structure your answer

Knowledge check: state the relevant framework, then explain how you apply it in practice with a brief example.

Example answer

“Confidentiality with students has clear limits: if there's a risk of harm to the student or someone else, I'm required to report it under mandatory reporting legislation, and I explain this boundary to students early in our work together so there are no surprises. In practice, that means I document disclosures factually and promptly, escalate through the school's designated child safety contact, and keep parents informed where it's appropriate and safe to do so. I keep case notes secure and only share information with staff or external providers on a need-to-know basis.”

6. How do you prioritise your caseload when multiple students need urgent support at the same time?

Why they ask

Assesses workload management and judgement, given counsellors often juggle scheduled sessions with unplanned crises across a whole school.

How to structure your answer

Process and judgement combined: explain your triage criteria, how you reassign time, and how you avoid dropping lower-priority cases.

Example answer

“I triage based on immediate safety risk first, then on how time-sensitive the issue is, for example a student in acute distress takes priority over a scheduled check-in that can be moved. I keep a simple running list of active cases with their status so nothing gets lost if I have to shift my day around a crisis. For students whose sessions get bumped, I let them know directly and reschedule promptly rather than letting it slide, since consistency matters a lot in building trust with this age group.”