

# SAP GUIDANCE

For Parents/Guardians

## WHAT IS SAP?

The Student Assistance Program, or SAP, is mandated by the state of Pennsylvania to be in every school. It is a team of school personnel (school counselors, teachers, school nurse, etc.) and a behavioral health community liaison (SAP counselor) working together to identify and address concerns that may be interfering with a student's ability to be successful in school. The SAP team have all received specialized training in providing Student Assistance Program services from the PA Department of Education and are trained to understand issues of mental health and chemical use, abuse, and dependency. The SAP program is a systematic process to identify issues and mobilize resources where the problems are beyond the scope of the school. The goal is for the school to work collaboratively with the student, family and community.

## **What is ESAP?**

The Elementary Student Assistance Program, or ESAP, is the SAP program provided within elementary schools. It follows the same processes and guidelines as the original SAP program that was implemented at the secondary level. At the elementary level, there is a strong focus on social emotional skills, behavioral concerns and mental health.

## **What SAP is NOT.**

- SAP is not a first intervention. It should be utilized after all other school-based interventions have failed.
- SAP is not ongoing therapy.
- SAP is not a punishment for policy violations.
- SAP is not mandatory. (Some exceptions exist in the case of policy violations per district policy).
- SAP is not a referral service. SAP does not replace other school programs (i.e. PBIS, CST, MTSS, Safe to Say, etc.)
- SAP is not a crisis service.

## **What services does SAP offer?**

- Short-term problem-solving individual counseling (typically approximately 6 sessions) This is a support service to students including, but not limited to, increasing motivation, goal setting, techniques for managing emotions, and general strategies for school success. These services can be delivered either during the school day, or after, and can be either in-person or virtual. Psychoeducational group counseling (i.e. anger management, self-esteem, anxiety, impulse control, social skills, etc.)
- Behavioral Health Assessments with follow-up recommendations and link to community services
- Short classroom instruction for social emotional learning lessons
- Behavioral health awareness and engagement activities

## **What does a SAP counselor do?**

SAP counselors have four main functions:

1. To improve students' engagement in the classroom
2. Collaborate with school SAP team
3. Provide psychoeducation to students (via groups)
4. Act as a bridge to community resources.

## **What is the difference between a SAP counselor and a School Counselor?**

School counselors are the school's primary resource and intervention for a student. They are employed by the district and utilize and facilitate all school related interventions, including academic supports, and are responsible for all college related processes. A SAP recommendation is made for those students who continue to struggle, and have not responded positively to school interventions. SAP works to mobilize resources beyond the scope of the school.



**Who can make a referral? Are they anonymous?**

Anyone can make a referral to SAP when they are concerned about a student's behavior, including school staff, classmates, friends, family, community members, or the students themselves. Referrals to SAP may be anonymous. Contact your child's school counselor to make a referral.

**Why would I refer?/Why might my child be referred?**

There are a variety of reasons why a student would be referred to the SAP program. Students can be referred due to a drop in grades, change in appearance, loss of interest in activities, disciplinary issues, talk of drug and alcohol use, depressed mood, uncontrolled anger, and other concerns that someone may have about a student.

**Does this mean that my child has a drug or alcohol problem?**

**No**, the SAP program works with students with a variety of concerns, including academics, attendance, health & behaviors. Any barriers to educational success are considered in the SAP process.

**What happens after my child is referred to SAP?**

The SAP team will decide to either offer available supports (1:1, group), or proceed with formal SAP process. If the latter, information is collected from your child's teachers and other sources (nurse, counselor, attendance, discipline) to identify concerns. Then, the SAP team will meet, review that information, and discuss options to best support your child. A SAP team member will contact you and discuss these options, and request your permission to move forward.

**Are referrals confidential?**

The entire SAP process is confidential, with the exceptions noted below. It is completely voluntary -- it may be stopped at any time. The process is designed to support students and families, and is not disciplinary in any way. A parent may be requested to sign a release to allow school staff to communicate with a SAP counselor about a student who has been referred for services. Exceptions to confidentiality: \*If the student is thinking about harming themselves (suicidal ideation) \*If the student is thinking about harming someone else (homicidal ideation) \*If someone else is harming the student (abuse)

**Why can't I have access to what my child is saying?**

When engaged in SAP, the student is the client. In order for the student to feel comfortable expressing themselves and disclosing their concerns, they are provided confidentiality. Otherwise the student may be too concerned with getting in trouble to be honest. Every student is informed that there are a few scenarios in which confidentiality is broken:

- \*If the student is thinking about harming themselves (suicidal ideation)
- \*If the student is thinking about harming someone else (homicidal ideation)
- \*If someone else is harming the student (abuse)

**Do I have to pay for this?**

Individual and group services are free to students attending school districts in which those services are offered. Assessments are free to students if they are a result of the formal SAP process that includes a discussion by the SAP team, as well as an intervention discussion with the school, parent, and student.

**What if my child doesn't want to participate?**

SAP is a voluntary program. If at any point in the SAP process your child doesn't want to participate, they are free to stop at any time.

**How does this affect my child's schedule and classes?**

It depends on the student as well as the SAP service being provided. The SAP counselor will work in cooperation with the school to limit the amount of time a student is missing instructional time.

**What does an assessment mean? Why is it being suggested? Do I need to follow the recommendations of the assessment?**

An assessment is an interview where the student provides his/her perspective about the events of their life. Questions are asked to get to know the student better and understand all of their strengths as well as their challenges. There is also an interview with parent(s) so that they can provide their perspective. An assessment is being suggested because the more we know about the student, the better we are able to provide resources that may be helpful. While recommendations are not mandatory, they have been thoughtfully identified to provide the best support in mind.

**How does my child qualify for an assessment?**

All recommendations for assessments must be formally made by the SAP team. Anyone can make a referral to the SAP team. Contact your child's school counselor for further information.