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Where can I find a good child psychiatrist with an office near my school? I just had an awful meeting with a parent; does anyone have 10 minutes to talk? Is there a local support group for LGBTQIA+ youth? Check out this workshop on CBT skills! Will your students be online this semester? It's the anniversary of the Easter bombings -- what are your schools doing to mark the occasion? Are you cancelling exams due to Covid?

These are just a few messages pinging on my busiest WhatsApp group -- *School Counsellors of Colombo*. As a school counselor and former therapist, I have always worked with a clinical supervisor, however, what I find just as indispensable is the *School Counsellors of Colombo*, a professional group I founded several years ago. The qualified and moral support, continuing education, local resources, and collegial collaboration throughout the years has been invaluable and I encourage all ISCA members to create or join a group like this during the upcoming school year.

A loose affiliation of about 15 counsellors from international K-12 institutions in Colombo, we convene once a semester -- now only via Zoom due to the pandemic -- for several hours of discussion on current issues facing our students, colleagues, and families. We share stories of counseling success and failure, sometimes seeking advice or simply a sounding board. Members lead topical professional development workshops based on expertise or a recent conference or course. Some of our schools have predominantly international students whilst others provide more for the local population yet we all offer international curricula geared toward an education in universal values. As professionals, it is imperative we continue to learn about the social/emotional belief systems of our host nation and the international communities we serve, sharing our knowledge and exchanging our resources about mental health.

Members of the *School Counsellors of Colombo* come from five countries including Sri Lanka and we are trained in everything from clinical psychology to CBT, educational psychology to mindfulness, school crisis to child safeguarding. This combined wealth of experience and diversity of knowledge mutually strengthens not only our professional capacities but provides us with the vital moral and emotional collegial support we need in our challenging field. A group like this is a microcosm of the plethora of proficiency and expertise in our wider ISCA community, a place where we can reach out and find the resources and encouragement that we need to be our best professional selves.

When Sri Lanka was rocked by several terrorist bombings on Easter Sunday 2019, our group was in constant communication: assisting those whose school members were directly affected, counseling each other on the fears instilled by extremism, sharing resources on crisis debrief and the process of responding to the tragic death of a student. When Covid forced schools to go



online, we conferred on how to best remotely counsel our students, how to support our colleagues, and how our institutions could continue to provide quality education. Our shared Google Drive is full of articles, presentations, and other resources on mental health topics ranging from anxiety and depression to comprehensive sexuality education. One way we continue to grow professionally is by accessing the [Resources page under the Member Section](#) on the ISCA website as well as learning from [past conference materials](#). Of significant importance is our “living” document of local professional referrals, including psychologists, therapists, psychiatrists, educational psychologists who can do testing, crisis hotlines and relevant government websites, occupational and speech therapists, and other noteworthy mental health resources; it’s a go-to guide for our schools’ communities. Use [this sample](#) to create one on your own.

How to Get Started

Here are some tips about how to start a counselor support & supervision group with schools in your location:

- **Join the the ISCA Members app** via Mighty Networks (learn how [here](#)) and [create a post](#) inquiring who in your local community would be interested in joining your group;
- **Use the [ISCA Member Directory](#)** and search by country for all members in your location; or, consider creating a group by region if your country has few school counselors;
- **Contact the schools in your area** and inquire whether they employ counselors;
- **Attend this year’s [ISCA Collaborative](#)** and connect with possible new members from your region;
- **State the purpose of your group** from the get-go; explain why you are creating the group, what you hope to accomplish, how often you plan to meet, and the importance of coming together as professionals to support one another and learn together;
- **Create a shared Google Drive folder** and populate it with successful lessons and presentations your group has done; use the [Resources page under the Member Section](#) on the ISCA website as well as the [Lesson Share](#) to continue to grow your folder for ideas you and your colleagues find effective;
- **Make a separate social media group** (such as WhatsApp, FB Messenger, or Google Chat or Hangouts) for your members to send and answer quick queries and support as needed.

We at ISCA are looking forward to hearing about your experiences and reflections on counselor support and supervision groups with international schools in your location.