
Informed Consent

Client-Counselor Service Agreement

Welcome to SWFL Counseling, LLC! This document contains important information about our professional services and business policies. It also contains summary information about the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), a federal law that provides privacy protections and patient rights about the use and disclosure of your Protected Health Information (PHI) for the purposes of treatment, payment, and health care operations. Although these documents are long and sometimes complex, it is very important that you understand them. When you sign this document, it will also represent an agreement between us. We can discuss any questions before you sign or at any time in the future.

Counseling is a relationship between people that works in part because of clearly defined rights and responsibilities held by each person. As a client in counseling, you have certain rights and responsibilities that are important for you to understand. There are also legal limitations to those rights that you should be aware of. We, as your counselors, have corresponding responsibilities to you. These rights and responsibilities are described in the following sections.

Goals of Counseling

There can be many goals for the counseling relationship. Some of these will be long term goals, such as improving the quality of your life, learning to live with mindfulness, or self-actualization. Others may be more immediate goals, such as decreasing anxiety and depression symptoms, developing healthy relationships, changing behavior, or decreasing/ending drug use. Whatever the goals for counseling, they will be set by you according to what you want to work on in counseling. The counselor may make suggestions on how to reach that goal, but you ultimately decide where you want to go.

Risks/Benefits of Counseling

Counseling is an intensely personal process which can bring unpleasant memories or emotions to the surface. That being said, there are many benefits to counseling. Counseling can help you develop coping skills, make behavioral changes, reduce symptoms of mental health disorders, improve the quality of your life, learn to manage anger, learn to live in the present, and many other positive outcomes. However, there are no guarantees that counseling will work for you. Progress has both ups and downs, but the downs rarely indicate failure. Counseling requires a very active effort on your part. In order to be most successful, you may have to work on things we discuss outside of sessions. If and when homework is given, your

counselor will discuss that with you; we do not assign “busy work” of any kind, so it can be assumed that there is a specific purpose for each and every assignment.

Confidentiality

Your counselor will make every effort to keep your personal information private. If you wish to have information released, you will be required to sign a consent form before such information will be released. There are some limitations to confidentiality to which you need to be aware. Your counselor may consult with a supervisor or other professional counselor in order to give you the best service. In the event that your counselor consults with another counselor, no identifying information such as your name would be released. Counselors are required by law to release information when a client poses a risk to him-/herself **or** others, **and** in cases of abuse to children or the elderly. If your counselor receives a court order or subpoena, he or she may be required to release your information. In such a case, your counselor may consult with other professionals and limit the release to only what is necessary by law.

Confidentiality and Technology

Some counselors and clients may choose to use technology in their counseling sessions. This includes but is not limited to online counseling via virtual meeting, telephone, email, text, or chat. Due to the nature of online counseling, there is always the possibility that unauthorized persons may attempt to discover your personal information. Your counselor will take every precaution to safeguard your information by using HIPAA-compliant programs, but cannot guarantee that unauthorized access to electronic communications could not occur. Please be advised to take precautions with regard to authorized and unauthorized access to any technology used in counseling sessions. Be aware of any friends, family members, significant others or co-workers who may have access to your computer, phone, or other technology used in your counseling sessions. Should a client have concerns about the safety of their email, your counselor can arrange to encrypt email communication with you.

Record Keeping

Your counselor may keep records of your counseling sessions and a treatment plan which includes goals for your counseling. These records are kept to ensure a direction to your sessions and continuity in service. They will not be shared except with respect to the limits to confidentiality discussed in the Confidentiality section. Should a client wish to have their records released, you are required to sign a release of information which specifies what information is to be released and to whom. The fee for records provided to clients is \$1/page. Records will be kept for at least 7 years but may be kept for longer. Records will be kept electronically, using a secure electronic medical record, and/or in a paper file and stored in a locked cabinet.

Appointment Scheduling

Appointments will ordinarily be 50 minutes in duration, as frequently as we determine necessary or desired. The time scheduled for your appointment is

assigned to you and you alone. You are responsible for coming to your session on time; if you are late, your appointment will still need to end on time.

There are some very appropriate, unavoidable reasons to cancel or reschedule an appointment with less than 24 hours notice, including (but not limited to) sickness, traffic circumstances, financial issues, and last-minute schedule changes. If you do need to cancel your scheduled appointment with less than 24 hours notice without a reasonable explanation, please be prepared to provide full compensation for the appointment. In order to facilitate this, please provide your credit card information for us to keep on file. It will be stored securely, and you will be notified via phone prior to any charges for no-show appointments.

If your counselor has any specific requirements regarding cancellations, he or she will discuss with you during your intake appointment. Please contact your counselor directly to cancel appointments, especially <24 hours prior to session.

Professional Fees

You are responsible for paying at the time of your session unless prior arrangements have been made. Acceptable forms of payment include cash, check, or credit card. The fee for NSF checks is \$25, and you will not be permitted to utilize that form of payment in the future. Should you plan to have someone else provide payment for your sessions, you must complete a **Third-Party Payment Authorization** to designate a payer. If you refuse to pay for your session, we reserve the right to use an attorney or collection agency to secure payment.

Fees vary by counselor, and may change at the discretion of the counselor. Please ask your counselor directly any questions regarding fees and/or payment arrangements. Please note that any letters, forms, or other correspondence requested will be charged at the counselor's hourly rate. Current hourly fee schedule can be found at <https://www.swflcounsel.com/payment>.

Insurance

SWFL Counseling, LLC is not a participating provider for any insurance plan, and we are not responsible for filing claims. However, we will supply you with a CMS-1500 form or Superbill, which may be submitted to your insurance company for reimbursement. Please check with your insurance company prior to your first appointment in order to verify your out-of-network benefits and procedures for seeking reimbursement. Feel free to discuss any questions or concerns regarding insurance with your counselor at any time.

Contacting Your Counselor

A scheduled appointment is an opportunity for you to address your counseling needs in a private space with your counselor's undivided attention. Please avoid utilizing telephone conversations, text messages, or email to discuss confidential matters, as those are best suited for the confines of the counseling office during a scheduled session, with the counselor's undivided attention and the utmost security.

for personal matters. Often, counselors are not immediately available by phone. We do not answer our calls or messages when we are with clients or otherwise unavailable. At these times, you may leave a message and your call will be returned as soon as possible, but it may take up to 24 hours for non-urgent matters. If you feel you cannot wait for a return call or it is an emergency situation, please immediately call 911. Communication preferences vary by counselor. We do strongly recommend saving your counselor's number in your phone for last-minute contact needs.

Consent to Counseling

Your signature indicates that you have read this Agreement and agree to its terms. Please ask BEFORE SIGNING if you have any questions or concerns.

Received and agreed: _____ Date: _____

Witnessed (Counselor): _____ Date: _____