



Informed Consent for Online Counseling

The purpose of this document is to inform you, the client, about many aspects of online counseling services: the process, the counseling, the potential risks and benefits of services, safeguards against those risks and alternatives to online services. Please read this entire document, sign at the bottom and return to your therapist prior to your first telehealth session.

A. Process

1) Possible Misunderstandings

The client should be aware that misunderstandings are possible with telephone and text based modalities such as email and real time internet chat because non-verbal cues are relatively lacking. Even with video chat software, misunderstandings may occur due to connection problems causing image delays or less than optimal image quality. Therapists are observers of human behavior and gather much information from body language, vocal inflection, eye contact and other non-verbal cues. If you have never engaged in online counseling before, please have patience with the process and clarify information if you think your therapist has not understood you well. Also, please be patient if your therapist asks for periodic clarification.

2) Turnaround Time

Using asynchronous (not in “real time”) communication such as email or instant messaging entails a “lag” of response. The therapist will make every effort to respond to email requests within a 24 hour period. If the client is in a state of crisis or emergency, the therapist recommends the client contact a crisis line or an agency local to the client. Clients may also utilize 1-800-SUICIDE or 1-800-273-TALK. (For the deaf or hard-of-hearing: 1-800-799 4TTY).

3) Privacy Of The Therapist

Although the internet provides the appearance of anonymity and privacy in counseling, privacy is more of an issue online than in person. Your therapist has chosen to use Doxy as the software provider for web conferencing and chat communications between the counselor and clients. The client is responsible for securing his or her own computer hardware, internet access points and password security.

The therapist has a right to privacy. Therefore, clients must seek the written permission of the therapist before recording any portion of the session.

B. Potential Benefits

The potential benefits of receiving mental health services online include both the circumstances in which the therapist considers online mental health services appropriate and the possible advantages of providing those services online. For example, the potential benefits of video chat include the convenience for clients to

potentially receive counseling from anywhere once an internet signal and necessary hardware are secured.

C. Potential Risks

There are various risks related to electronic provision of counseling services related to the technology used, the distance between counselor and client and issues related to timeliness. For example, the potential risks of email based counseling may include messages not being received and confidentiality being breached through unencrypted email, lack of password protection or leaving information on a public access computer in a library or internet cafe. Messages could fail to be received if they are sent to the wrong address (which might also breach confidentiality) or if they just are not noticed by the therapist. Confidentiality could be breached in transit by hackers or internet service providers or at either end by others with access to the client's account or computer. People accessing the internet from public locations such as a library, computer lab or cafe should consider the visibility of their screen to people around them. Position yourself to avoid others ability to read your screen. Using cell phones can also be risky in that signals are scrambled but rarely encrypted.

D. Safeguards

Your therapist has selected an account with Doxy for chat and video communications to allow for the highest possible security and confidentiality of the content of your sessions. Doxy can be used by following a personalized link and used without downloading any new software. Your personal information is encrypted and stored on a secure server in compliance with HIPAA regulations. The client is responsible for creating and using additional safeguards when the computer used to access services may be accessed by others, such as creating passwords to use the computer, keeping their email and chat ID's and passwords secret and maintaining security of their wireless internet access points. The therapist and client will also choose a password in the first session to be exchanged at the beginning of all subsequent distance sessions in order to verify the identity of the client. Please discuss any additional concerns with your therapist early in your first session so as to develop strategies to limit risk.

E. Alternatives

Online counseling may not be appropriate for many types of clients including those who have numerous concerns over the risks of internet counseling, clients with active suicidal or homicidal thoughts and clients who are experiencing active manic/psychotic symptoms. An alternative to receiving mental health services online would be receiving mental health services in person, if possible. ICT Therapyworks will assist clients who would like to explore face-to-face options in their area. Please feel free to request a referral at any time you think a different counseling relationship would be more practical or beneficial for you.

F. Proxies

The therapist requires this consent form to be signed by the legal guardian of any client seeking services who is under the age of 18. The name and contact information of the legal guardian will be kept as part of the client's record.

G. Confidentiality Of The Client

Maintaining client confidentiality is extremely important to the therapist and the therapist will take ordinary care and consideration to prevent unnecessary disclosure. Information about the client will only be released with his or her express and written permission with the exceptions of the following cases:

- 1) If the therapist believes that someone is seriously considering and likely to attempt suicide;
- 2) If the therapist believes that someone intends to assault another person
- 3) If the therapist believes someone is engaging or intends to engage in behavior which will expose another person to a potentially life-threatening communicable disease;
- 4) If the therapist suspects abuse, neglect or exploitation of a minor or of an incapacitated adult;
- 5) If the therapist believes that someone's mental condition leaves the person gravely disabled.

H. Records

The therapist will maintain records of online counseling and/or consultation services. These records can include reference notes, copies of transcripts of chat and internet communication and session summaries. These records are confidential and will be maintained as required by applicable legal and ethical standards according to the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy or the Kansas Behavioral Sciences Regulatory Board (depending on your therapist's governing organization). The client will be asked in advance for permission before any audio or video recording would occur on the therapist's end.

I. Procedures

Your therapist might not immediately receive an online communication or might experience a local backup affecting internet connectivity. If the client is in a state of crisis or emergency, the therapist recommends contacting a crisis line or an agency local to the client. Clients may utilize the following crisis hotlines: 1-800-SUICIDE; 1-800-273-TALK; (For the deaf or hard-of-hearing: 1-800-799 4TTY).

J. Payment

Payment options are to be discussed prior to sessions with your individual therapist. Signature below indicates that you are aware of session fees for telehealth sessions and have agreed to pay in the format and timing arranged with your therapist.

K. Disconnection Of Services

If there is ever a disruption of services on the internet that cannot be re-established within five minutes, the therapist will contact client or client's representative via telephone to discuss how to proceed with the session.

Client signature (or client representative signature)

Date