

Student Counseling Services Washington & Jefferson College

Informed Consent for Psychotherapy or Other Services

Welcome to Student Counseling Services. Thank you for trusting us to assist you with your personal concerns. Please take the time to read and understand this document and ask your counselor about any portions which may be unclear to you.

This document contains important information about our professional services and policies. It also contains summary information about the use and disclosure of your Protected Health Information (PHI) as it may be used for the purpose of treatment, payment, and health care operations. We also provide you with a Notice of Privacy Practices. The accompanying Notice of Privacy Practices explains further the steps we take to protect your health information. The law requires that we obtain your signature acknowledging that we have provided you with this information before we provide any services. You may revoke this Agreement in writing at any time.

Services

The psychological services we provide include brief individual and group psychotherapy, and a referral program. We may offer psychological testing services as well. Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the therapist and client, and the particular problems you are experiencing. There are many different methods we may use to deal with the problems that you hope to address. Psychotherapy calls for an active effort on your part. In order for therapy to be most successful, you will have to work on things we talk about both during sessions and at home.

Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings. On the other hand, psychotherapy has also been shown to have many benefits. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress, but there are no guarantees of what you will experience.

In your first session your therapist will offer you some sense of what therapy will entail and how she or he will work with you to address your concerns. You should evaluate this information and whether you feel comfortable working with your therapist. If you have questions about our procedures, you should discuss them with your therapist whenever they arise. You have the right to ask for the rationale for any aspect of your treatment or to decline any part of your treatment. You also have the right to request a referral to another therapist. While we encourage you to discuss your concerns with your current therapist to explore why things may not be working out, you are under no obligation to do so.

If you are here for psychological testing, you have the right to an explanation of what the test or tests being administered are for, and you may decline participation at any time. You also have the right to a summary (which may be either verbal or written) of any test results.

Eligibility and Fees

All Counseling Center services are available to all currently enrolled students. Up to twelve individual counseling sessions per academic year are available at no additional cost at the Counseling Center. The number of Group Therapy and Support Group sessions is unlimited. If a student is referred to an outside provider for on-going treatment the fees of the outside provider are the student's responsibility.

Policies Regarding Appointments

Individual and couples therapy appointments are generally for 50 minutes and are typically scheduled once per week or bi-weekly at a time you and your therapist agree on. That appointment time is often a standing time each week, and will be reserved for you until you no longer want it or you have reached your 12 session limit for the year. If you cannot make a scheduled appointment, it is your responsibility to call (724) 223-6056 to cancel. If you forget an appointment, please call as soon as possible to reschedule. If you miss your appointment and do not call to reschedule, your standing appointment time may not be held for you, and there is no guarantee your therapist will have another appointment time immediately available.

Therapy groups usually meet once a week for 90 minutes. Before joining a group you must meet with the therapist leading the group to discuss your interests and any questions or concerns you may have. If you must miss a group session, let the group know the week beforehand. If that is not possible, please call to cancel.

Please note that email is not a secure form of communication and is not recommended as a means of contacting your therapist for any treatment-related concerns. Unless your therapist and you agree otherwise, please call to leave any messages, and talk with the Center's Administrative Assistant if you need to cancel or reschedule an appointment. Note that any communication you have with a therapist outside of a regular appointment session may be recorded in your file at the Counseling Center. Communication could be information shared face-to-face with your therapist, email messages, phone calls, etc.

In an Emergency

In some instances, you might need immediate help at a time when your therapist is not at the Counseling Center or cannot return your call. These emergencies may involve suicidal thoughts, thoughts of wanting to hurt someone else, or thoughts of committing dangerous acts. If you find yourself in any emergency situation Monday through Friday, come to our Walk-in Counseling Hours. At other times, call Protection Services at (724) 223-6032 and ask to speak with a counselor. When our office is closed the Office of Protection Services can assist you. The officer who takes your call will immediately call the counselor on duty, who will return your call. If for any reason that option is not available to you, visit the nearest Emergency Room and ask for the mental health professional on call.

Below are some additional numbers which are answered on a 24-hour basis and may be helpful to you in case of an emergency:

- **“911”- in Washington County the emergency dispatcher can connect you 24 hours a day to a mental health crisis worker**
- **1-800-273 TALK (8255) reaches the National Suicide Prevention Hotline**

Limits of Confidentiality

The law protects the privacy of all communications between a client and a psychologist. In most situations, we can only release information about your treatment to others if you sign a written authorization form. With your signed release we can provide information to parents, college officials, other treatment providers and others whom you designate. There are other situations that require only that you provide written, advance consent. Your signature on the accompanying Acknowledgment of Informed Consent to Treatment form provides consent for those activities, as follows:

- We will sometimes train advanced graduate students from the mental health professions, and may also employ psychologists who are not yet licensed. The Director is a licensed psychologist who will supervise the trainees; this includes reviewing treatment plans and progress, and signing off on all notes and other documents that go into your permanent file. You have the right to know the name of any supervisor and how to contact her or him; the staff member you meet with will provide this information at the outset.
- Because of our training mission, the staff member you meet with may ask your permission to record sessions for confidential supervisory and training purposes. Audiotapes and videotapes are kept in a locked cabinet and erased at the end of your treatment or at the end of each semester. Occasionally, tapes and other clinical materials (e.g. test results) may be presented in case conferences or other internal Counseling Center training seminars for our professional staff. In such instances, potentially identifying information about you will be altered to protect your anonymity.
- Your therapist may also occasionally find it helpful to consult with other professionals without identifying you to the consultant. If you don't object, your therapist will not tell you about these consultations unless he or she feels that it is important to your work together. Your therapist will note all consultations in your Clinical Record.
- Finally, we employ administrative staff and we need to share protected information with them for both clinical and administrative purposes, such as scheduling, billing, and quality assurance. All staff members have been given training about protecting your privacy and have agreed not to release any information outside the Counseling Center without the permission of a professional staff member.

There are some situations where we are permitted or required to disclose information either with or without your consent or authorization:

- If you are involved in a court proceeding and a request is made for information concerning your treatment, we cannot provide such information without your (or your legal representative's) written authorization, or a court order. If you are involved in or contemplating litigation, you should consult with your attorney to determine whether a court would be likely to order your therapist to disclose information.
- If a government agency is requesting the information for health oversight activities, we may be required to provide it for them.
- If a client files a complaint or lawsuit against a therapist, we may disclose relevant information regarding that client in order to defend the therapist.
- If a client files a worker's compensation claim, we must, upon appropriate request, provide a copy of the client's record or a report of her/his treatment.

There are some situations in which the therapist is legally obligated to take actions which she or he believes are necessary to attempt to protect others from harm, and we may have to reveal some information about a client's treatment. If such a situation arises, your therapist will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action and will limit disclosure to what is necessary.

- If your therapist has reason to believe that a child or vulnerable adult is being neglected or abused, the law requires that the situation be reported to the appropriate state agency.
- If the therapist believes you present a clear and substantial danger of harm to yourself or another/others, he or she will take protective actions. These may include contacting family members, seeking hospitalization for you, notifying any potential victim(s), and notifying the police and appropriate college officials.

While this summary is designed to provide an overview of confidentiality and its limits, it is important that you read our Notice of Privacy Practices for more detailed explanations, and discuss with the staff member you meet with any questions or concerns you may have.

Professional Records

The laws and standards of our profession require that we keep Protected Health Information about you in your Clinical Record. Your Clinical Record is not a part of your academic record. Your Clinical Record includes information about your reasons for seeking therapy, a description of the ways in which your problem affects your life, your diagnosis, the goals for treatment, your progress toward those goals, your medical and social history, your treatment history, results of clinical tests (including raw test data), any past treatment records that we receive from other providers, reports of any professional consultations, any payment records, and copies of any reports that have been sent to anyone. You may examine and/or receive a copy of your Clinical Record, if you request it in writing, except in unusual circumstances that involve danger to yourself and/or others or when another individual (other than another health care provider) is referenced and we believe disclosing that information puts the other person at risk of substantial harm. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. We therefore recommend that you initially review them in the presence of your therapist, or have them forwarded to another mental health professional so you can discuss the contents. In most circumstances, we are allowed to charge a copying fee of \$.10 per page. You may expect to receive the copies within 15 working days of your request. If we refuse your request for access to your records, you have a right of review, which we will discuss with you upon request. Complete Clinical Records are maintained for seven years.

In addition, your therapist may also keep a set of psychotherapy notes which are for his or her own use and designed to assist your therapist in providing you with the best treatment. These notes are kept separate from your Clinical Record. They are not routinely released to others with your Clinical Record, except under rare legal circumstances.

Minors

If you are under 18 years of age, please be aware that the law may provide your parents the right to examine your treatment records. Before giving parents any information we will discuss the matter with you, if possible, and do our best to handle any objections you may have with what we are prepared to discuss.

In Conclusion

Your signature on the accompanying Acknowledgement of Informed Consent to Treatment form indicates you have read the information in this document and agree to abide by its terms during our professional relationship.