



Psychological & Counseling Centre, LLC

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CLINICIAN-CLIENT SERVICES AGREEMENT

Welcome to Vista Psychological & Counseling Centre, LLC. This Agreement contains important information about our professional services and business policies. It also contains summary information about the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA), the federal law that provides privacy protections and patient rights with regard to the use and disclosure of your Protected Health Information (PHI) used for the purpose of treatment, payment, and health care operations. HIPPA requires that you are provided with a Notice of Privacy Practices (the Notice) for use and disclosure of PHI for treatment, payment, and health care operations. The Notice, explains HIPPA and its application to your personal health information in greater detail. The law requires your signature acknowledging that you have been provided with this information before or at the time of your initial consultation. Any questions you might have about the procedures can be discussed at the time of your initial consultation. Although these documents are lengthy and complex, it is important that read them carefully. The signed document will represent an agreement between you and the clinician/practice. You may revoke this Agreement in writing at any time. That revocation will be binding unless the clinician has taken action in reliance on it; if there are obligations imposed on the clinician by your health insurer in order to process or substantiate claims made under your policy; or if you have not satisfied any financial obligations you have incurred.

PSYCHOLOGICAL AND COUNSELING SERVICES

Psychotherapy/counseling is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the clinician and client, and the particular problems that you hope to address. Psychotherapy/counseling is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, it calls for a very active effort on your part. In order for the therapy to be most successful, you will need to work on those things discussed both during the sessions and at home.

Psychotherapy/counseling can have benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing unpleasant aspect of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. On the other hand, psychotherapy/counseling has also been shown to have many benefits. It can often lead to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. But there are no assurances of what you might experience.

The first few sessions will likely involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, some impressions will be offered as well as a plan for treatment, if you decide to continue. You should evaluate this information along with your own opinions of whether you feel comfortable working with the clinician. Psychotherapy/counseling involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should be very careful about the clinician you select. If you have questions about procedures, they should be discussed. If your doubts persist, a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion can be arranged.

MEETINGS

Typically, an evaluation will last from 2-4 sessions. During this time, you and the clinician will decide if they are the best person to provide the services you need in order to meet your treatment goals. Psychotherapy/counseling is usually scheduled as a 50-minute session (one appointment is equivalent to 50 minutes in duration) once per week at an agreed upon time. However, this can vary depending upon individual needs and availability. **Once an appointment has been scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide 24 hours advance notice of cancellation (with exceptions being circumstances beyond your reasonable control). It is important to note that insurance companies do not provide reimbursement for cancelled appointments.** If it is possible, another time will be offered to reschedule the cancelled appointment.

PROFESSIONAL FEES

Professional fees are determined by the professional licensure of the service provider rendering services and/or the nature of the clinical work. A specific list of fees is available upon request. Professionals will generally discuss fees with you at the time of the first visit. Services requiring legal involvement invoke fees for all professional time, including preparation and transportation costs, even if the clinician is called to testify for another party.

CONTACTING YOUR CLINICIAN

Clinicians are often not immediately available by telephone, as they are at most times meeting with patients. The office telephone will be answered by a secretary during office hours. An answering service will receive calls after hours, on weekends, and holidays. Every effort will be made to return your call on the same day you make it. Please provide phone numbers at which you can be reached and some times when you will be available. If you are unable to reach your clinician and feel that you can't wait for a return call, contact your family physician or the nearest emergency room and ask for the psychologist or psychiatrist on call. If your clinician will be unavailable for an extended time, another clinician will be available for you during the interim.

LIMITS ON CONFIDENTIALITY

The law protects the privacy of all communications between a patient and a clinician. In most situations, information about your treatment can only be released to others if you sign a written authorization form that meets certain legal requirements imposed by HIPAA. There are other situations that require only that you provide written, advance consent. Your signature on this Agreement provides consent for the activities, as follows:

- A clinician may occasionally find it helpful to consult other health and mental health professionals about a case. During a consultation, every effort is made to avoid revealing the identity of the patient. The other professionals are also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you don't object, you will not be informed about these consultations unless it is deemed important. All consultations will be noted in your Clinical Records (which is referenced as the "PHI" in the Notice of Policies and Practices to Protect the Privacy of Your Health Information).
- You should be aware that this practice includes other mental health professionals and administrative staff. In most cases, it is necessary to share protected information with these individuals for both clinical and administrative purposes, such as scheduling, billing and quality assurance. All of the mental health professionals are bound by the same rules of confidentiality. All staff members have been given training about protecting your privacy and have agreed not to release any information outside of the practice without the permission of a professional staff member.
- This practice has contracts with an answering service and collection agency. As required by HIPAA, a formal business associate contract with this/these business(es), in which it/they promise to maintain the confidentiality of this data except as specifically allowed in the contract or otherwise required by law, has been established. If you wish, you can be provided the names of these organizations and/or a blank copy of the contract.
- Disclosures required by health insurers or to collect overdue fees are discussed elsewhere in the Agreement.

There are some situations whereby the clinician is permitted or required to disclose information without either your consent or Authorization:

- If you are involved in a court proceeding and a request is made for information concerning your evaluation, diagnosis or treatment, such information is protected by the privileged communication law. The clinician cannot provide any information without your (or your personal or legal representative's) written authorization, or a court order. If you are involved in or are contemplating litigation, you should consult with your attorney to determine whether a court would be likely to order the clinician to disclose information.
- If a government agency is requesting the information for health oversight activities, the clinician may be required to provide it for them.

- If a client files a complaint or lawsuit against the clinician, that clinician may disclose relevant information regarding the client in order to defend him/herself.

There are some situations in which the clinician is legally obligated to take actions, which he/she believes are necessary to attempt to protect other from harm. In doing so, the clinician may have to reveal some information about a client's treatment.

- If the clinician knows or has reason to suspect that a child under 18 years of age, or a mentally retarded, developmentally disabled, or physically impaired individual under the age of 21 year of age, has suffered or faces a threat of suffering any physical or mental wound, injury, disability, or condition of a nature that reasonably indicates abuse or neglect of the child/individual, the law requires that the clinician file a report with the appropriate government agency, usually the Public Children Services Agency. Once such a report is filed, the clinician by be required to provide additional information.
- If the clinician has reasonable cause to believe that an adult is being abused, neglected, or exploited, or is in a condition which is the result of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, the law requires that the clinician report such belief to the county Department of Job and Family Services. Once such a report has been filed, the clinician may be required to provide additional information.
- If the clinician knows or has reasonable cause to believe that a client has been the victim of domestic violence, he/she must note that knowledge or belief and the basis for it in the client's record.
- If the clinician believes that a patient presents a clear and substantial risk of imminent serious harm to him/herself or someone else and he/she believes that disclosure of certain information may serve to protect that individual, then the clinician must disclose that information to the appropriate public authorities, and/or the potential victim, and/or professional workers, and/or the family of the client.

If such a situation arises, the clinician will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action will limit the disclosure to what is necessary.

While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important that you discuss with the clinician any questions or concerns that you may have now or in the future. The laws governing confidentiality can be quite complex, and clinicians are not attorneys. In situations where specific advice is required, formal legal advice may be needed.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDS

The laws and standards of psychology and counseling professions require that the clinician keep Protected Health Information (PHI) about you in your Clinical Record. Except in unusual circumstances that involve danger to yourself and/or others, you may examine and/or receive a copy of your Clinical Record, if you request in writing and the request is signed by you and dated not more than 60 days from the date submitted. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. For this reason, it is recommended that you initially review them in the presence of the clinician or have them forwarded to another mental health professional so you can discuss the contents. In most circumstances, the law allows clinicians to charge a copying fee of \$1 per page for the first ten pages, 50 cents per page for pages 11 through 50, and 20 cents per page for pages in excess of fifty, plus a \$15 fee for records search, plus postage. If you request for access to your records is refused, you have the right of review, which will be discussed with you upon request.

CLIENT RIGHTS

HIPPA provides guidelines and policies regarding your rights to your Clinical Record and disclosures of protected health information. These rights include requesting that the clinician amend your record; requesting restrictions on what information from your Clinical Record is disclosed to others; requesting an accounting of most disclosures of protected health information that you have neither consented to nor authorized; determining the location to which protected information disclosures are sent; having any complaints you make about policies and procedures recorded in your records; and the right to paper copy of this Agreement, the Notice form, and privacy policies and procedures.

MINORS AND PARENTS

Clients who are under 14 years of age and who are not emancipated, along with their parents, should be aware that the law allows parents to examine their child's treatment records unless the clinician decides that such access would injure the child, or parties have agreed otherwise. Children between the ages of 14 and 18 years of age may independently consent to and receive up to 6 sessions of psychotherapy/counseling services provided it is within a 30 day period. No information about those sessions can be disclosed to anyone without the child's agreement. While privacy in psychotherapy/counseling is often crucial to successful progress, particularly with teenagers, parental involvement is also essential to successful treatment. For children 14 and over, it is policy to request an agreement between the client and his/her parents allowing the clinician to share general information about the progress of the child's treatment and his/her attendance at scheduled sessions. The clinician will also provide parents with a summary of their child's treatment when it is complete. Any other communication will require the child's Authorization, unless the clinician feels that the child is in danger, or is a danger to someone else, or a threat to property, in which case, the clinician will notify the parents of the concern. Before giving parents any information, the clinician will discuss the matter with the child, if possible, and will do his/her best to handle any objections that the child may have.

BILLING AND PAYMENTS

You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless agreed to otherwise or unless you have insurance coverage that requires another arrangement. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to when they are requested.

If your account has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements for payment have not been agreed upon, Vista Psychological & Counseling Centre, LLC has the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may involve hiring a collection agency or going through small claims court which will require the clinician to disclose otherwise confidential information. In most collection situations, the only information that the clinician will release regarding a client's treatment is his/her name, the nature of services provided, dates of service, and the amount due.

INSURANCE REIMBURSEMENT

In order for Vista Psychological & Counseling Centre, LLC, to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate what resources you have available to pay for your treatment. If you have a health insurance policy, it will usually provide some coverage for mental health treatment. Vista Psychological & Counseling Centre, LLC, will fill out forms and provide you with whatever assistance it can in helping you receive the benefits to which you are entitled. However, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of the clinician's fees. It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

You should carefully read the section in your insurance coverage booklet that describes mental health services. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. Of course, Vista Psychological & Counseling Centre, LLC, will be happy to help you in understanding the information you receive from your insurance company. If it is necessary to clear confusion, Vista will be willing to call the company on your behalf.

Due to the rising costs of health care, insurance benefits have increasingly become more complex. It is sometimes difficult to determine exactly how much mental health coverage is available. "Managed Health Care" plans such as HMOs and PPOs often require authorization before they provide reimbursement for mental health services. These plans are often limited to short-term treatment approaches designed to work out specific problems that interfere with a person's usual level of functioning. It may be necessary to seek approval for more psychotherapy/counseling after a certain number of sessions. While much can be accomplished in short term psychotherapy/counseling, some clients feel that they need more service after insurance benefits end. Some managed-care plans will not allow the clinician to provide services to you once your benefits end. If this is the case, the clinician will do their best to find another provider who will help you continue your psychotherapy/counseling.

You should also be aware that your contract with your health insurance company requires that the clinician provide it with information relevant to the services provided to you. The clinician is required to provide a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes the clinician is required to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of your entire clinical record. In such situations, the clinician will make every effort to release only the minimum information about you that is necessary for the purpose requested. This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored in a computer. Though all insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, the clinician has not control over what they do with it once it is in their hands. In some cases, they may share the information with a national medical information databank. The clinician will provide you with a copy of any report they submit, if you request it. By signing this Agreement, you agree that the clinician can provide requested information to your insurance carrier.

Once Vista Psychological & Counseling Centre, LLC has all of the information about your insurance coverage, it will be possible to discuss what can be accomplished with the benefits that are available and what will happen if they run out before you feel ready to end your sessions. It is important to remember that you always have the right to pay for the clinician's services to avoid the potential problems described above.

YOUR SIGNATURE BELOW INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ THIS AGREEMENT AND AGREE TO ITS TERMS. YOUR SIGNATURE ALSO SERVES AS AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED THE HIPPA NOTICE FORM DESCRIBED ABOVE.

Client or Guardian Signature

Date

Relationship to Client

Witness

Date