



Family Restoration

COUNSELING SERVICES

Informed Consent for Technology-Assisted Counseling

The purpose of this Informed Consent for Technology Assisted Counseling is to inform you, the client, about the process of online counseling services, and the potential risks and benefits of these services. The purpose is to also help safeguard you, the client, and give you information regarding alternatives to online services. This consent is an addendum to the regular informed consent you are required to sign.

The Technology-Assisted Counseling Process

Privacy & Confidentiality

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

1. If your therapist believes that someone is seriously considering or likely to attempt suicide
2. If your therapist believes that someone intends to assault another person
3. If your 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 your therapist suspects abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a minor or incapacitated adult
5. If your therapist believes someone's mental condition leaves the person gravely disabled.

Although the internet provides the appearance of anonymity and privacy in counseling, privacy is more of an issue online than in person. The client is responsible for understanding the potential risks of confidentiality being breached through unencrypted email, lack of password protection or leaving information on a public access computer in a library or internet café.

Other potential risks of breaching confidentiality could include messages failing to be received if they are sent to the wrong address or if they are just not noticed by your 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. Clients accessing the internet from public locations such as a library, computer lab, or café should consider the visibility of their screen to people around them. Position yourself to avoid others seeing your screen. Using cell phones can be risky in that signals are scrambled but rarely encrypted.

Your therapist has a right to her/his privacy and may restrict the use of any copies or recordings the client makes of their communications. Clients must seek the permission of the therapist before recording any portion of the session and/or posting any portion of said sessions on internet websites such as Facebook or YouTube.

The client is responsible for securing their own computer hardware, internet access points, chat software, email and passwords that are encrypted, secure, and HIPAA compliant when possible.

Lack of Non-Verbal Cues & Asynchronous Communication

The client should be aware that misunderstandings are possible with telephone, text-based modalities such as email, and real-time internet chat, since non-verbal cues are relatively lacking. Even with video chat software, misunderstandings may occur since bandwidth is always limited and images lack detail. 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, have patience with the process and clarify information if you think your therapist has not understood you well. Be patient if your therapist asks periodically for clarification as well.

Benefits of Receiving Technology-Assisted Counseling

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 email may include 1) being able to send and receive messages at any time of the day or night; 2) never having to leave messages with intermediaries, avoiding voice mail and "telephone tag"; 3) being able to take as long as one wants to compose and having the opportunity to reflect upon one's messages; 4) automatically having a record of communications to refer to later; and 5) feeling less inhibited than in person. Text-based chat has many of the same advantages of convenience, feeling reduced scrutiny from the therapist having time to compose a response and being able to refer back to chat logs for reference. Video chat is also convenient, allowing clients to potentially be counseled from anywhere once one gains an internet signal and can operate the necessary hardware.

Potential Risks of Receiving Technology-Assisted Counseling & Safeguards

There are various risks related to providing technology-assisted counseling services related to the technology used, the distance between therapist and client, and issues related to timeliness. These risks of concerns for privacy and confidentiality were mentioned in section A. above. Your therapist has selected a video conferencing account that is encrypted with a HIPAA compliant secure platform to allow for the highest possible security and confidentiality of the content of your sessions. 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 IDs and passwords secret, and maintaining security of their wireless internet access points (where applicable.) Please discuss any such concerns with your therapist during your first session so as to develop ways to limit risks. If there is ever a disruption or disconnection of services on the internet, the therapist is not liable for lost time.

Alternatives to Technology-Assisted Counseling, Termination & Referrals

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/homicidal thoughts, clients who are experiencing active manic/psychotic symptoms, or clients who are minors. You have the right to terminate therapy at any time. Please feel free to request a referral any time you think a different counseling relationship would be more practical or beneficial for you. If you choose to do so, I will offer to provide you with names of other qualified professionals whose services you might prefer.

Client Agreement & Signature

By signing your name, you acknowledge that you have read and agreed to the terms listed in this Informed Consent.

Client Printed Name

Client Signature

Date