



POLICIES & CONSENT FOR COUNSELING SERVICES

Welcome to **The Counseling Room LLC**, where Christianity and evidenced-based counseling practices comfortably abide! I look forward to working with you to achieve your therapeutic goals. First, let us review some important information and guidelines:

Purposes & Goals: Counseling can have many purposes, such as to improve mental health and wellbeing, enhance communication skills, build healthier relationships, heal from trauma, and much more. The counselor will work with you to outline your unique therapeutic goals in what is called a *Treatment Plan*. From beginning to end, the

counselor will clearly communicate and explain diagnoses (only if one is warranted), results of assessment tools or tests used, therapeutic objectives, possible outcomes of the counseling process, as well as the progresses and/or obstacles encountered along the counseling journey. As the client, you may refuse services and recommendations at any time; and the counselor will discuss alternatives with you. If you have any questions or concerns about your treatment plan, please discuss them with the counselor.

Potential Risks & Benefits: Counseling is a process in which you and the counselor will discuss many issues, events, experiences, memories, etc. for the purpose of creating positive change. It provides an opportunity to understand one's self (and others) more deeply, as well as any difficulties you may be experiencing. Some benefits include reduced stress/anxiety, decreased negative thought patterns, improved interpersonal relationships, increased capacity for intimacy, and much more. While **counseling is a joint effort between the client and counselor**, it may require substantial effort on your part such as active participation, honesty with the counselor and yourself, and a willingness to explore (and possibly change) thoughts, feelings, and actions. Progress and success in counseling depend on many factors. However, benefits are more likely to occur when clients are fully invested in the therapeutic process.

Participating in counseling may also involve some discomfort, including remembering and discussing unpleasant or traumatic events, feelings, and experiences. The counseling process may evoke strong feelings of sadness, anger, fear, anxiety, etc. There may be times when the counselor will challenge your perceptions and assumptions and offer different perspectives. The issues discussed in counseling may also result in unintended outcomes, including changes in personal relationships. Sometimes, a decision that is positive for one family member (or a partner in a relationship), is viewed quite differently by the other family member or romantic partner. Please know that **any decision on the status of your relationships or your personal life is solely your responsibility**. During the therapeutic process, many people find that they feel worse before they feel better. This is generally the normal course of events.

Personal growth and change may be easy and swift at times, but most often, it is a slow (and possibly frustrating) process. Please feel free to discuss your concerns about progress with your counselor. Due to the uniqueness of each client and varying nature of the issues a client may enter counseling with, it is not possible to predict the exact length of counseling services needed to guarantee a specific outcome. The therapeutic process is different for everyone.

Confidentiality & Limitations of Confidentiality: Under normal circumstances, the counselor will not disclose what you share during the counseling sessions. However, exceptions to maintaining privacy and confidentiality will be made when:

1. Reporting suspected child abuse and neglect
2. Reporting imminent danger to yourself or others
3. Reporting information required in court proceedings or by your insurance company, or other relevant agencies
4. Providing information for professional case consultation or supervision
5. Defending claims brought by you against the counselor

The actions involved in exceptions #1 and #2 above may include the counselor notifying the potential victim, contacting the proper authorities (e.g., police and Abuse Hotline), or seeking hospitalization for the client. If the client threatens to harm himself/herself, the counselor may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection. If a similar situation occurs in the course of your therapeutic services with The Counseling Room, the counselor will attempt to fully discuss the necessary course of action with you before taking any action.

Please be advised that while the counselor will maintain confidentiality under normal and safe circumstances, it cannot be guaranteed that a partner(s) or family member(s) in couple's or family counseling, respectively, will maintain confidentiality.

Session Length and Cost: Individual sessions are no more than 60 minutes and cost \$65/session; couple's sessions are between 60 and 90 minutes and cost \$75/session; and family sessions are between 60 and 120 minutes (depending on the size of the family) and cost \$85/session. Currently, the counselor facilitates family counseling sessions comprised of no more than 3 family members. If a session ends before the allotted time, you are still responsible for the full payment of the session.

Payments: Payments are due in full at the time of booking a service. There are **no refunds**. You may choose to pay using debit/credit card, Cash App, or Zelle.

The Counseling Room LLC stores debit and credit card information online in a secure and HIPPA-compliant database to bill for session fees, copays, deductibles, and cancellation fees more conveniently. If you would prefer not to have your payment information stored, please let the counselor know.

Currently, The Counseling Room is a self-pay service only (i.e., payment via health insurance plans is not accepted). Please visit the business website (www.thecounselingroomllc.com) to learn more about The Counseling Room's perspective on the use of health insurance plans and the benefits of self-pay. If/when The Counseling Room begins to accept health insurance, this document will be revised to reflect the policy around insurance and reimbursement. Please be advised that any outstanding fees denied or not otherwise covered by an Employee Assistance Program (EAP) will be your responsibility, regardless of prior quote coverage.

Cancellations: Cancellations/rescheduling must be arranged at least **24 hours before the session's start time** (e.g., a Saturday 2PM session must be cancelled no later than Friday 2PM). There is a 15-minute grace period. **If you do not present to the session within 15 minutes, it will be cancelled.** Full payment is still required for a shortened session (i.e., shortened due to client arriving late). An Employee Assistance Program (EAP) will not pay for the late, cancelled, or missed session. In case of inclement weather, a challenge with transportation, or any reason you are unable to reach the office for an in-person session, you can opt to attend the session virtually

(i.e., online video call). Otherwise, the session will be cancelled. If you present to a session under the influence of drugs or alcohol, the counselor may end the session early, and you will be responsible for the full payment of the session. **Currently, due to the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), all sessions are held virtually** (see *Technology* section for details).

Limitations of Service: The Counseling Room does not provide 24-hour care, nor does it serve as a crisis hotline. If you are experiencing a crisis (e.g., emergency, thoughts of suicide or homicide, etc.) between scheduled sessions, please call 9-1-1. If experiencing suicidal thoughts, you may also call the Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-8255. This hotline is available 24/7. Once stable, you may process the situation with the counselor in the next scheduled session.

Record Keeping: Records of your sessions are kept. You have the right to a copy of your file at any time. You have the right to request that we correct any error in your file. Upon a written request, you also have the right to request the counselor to make a copy of your file available to any other health care provider. Records are securely maintained for 7 years following termination of services. After the 7 years have elapsed, the records are destroyed in a manner that preserves your confidentiality.

Audio and/or video recordings of the sessions are not permitted.

How Friends & Family Can Help: If a friend or family member is able to offer healthy support, it can help you in the therapeutic process. They could potentially attend a session with you, listen to you, help with tasks, or hold you accountable for the positive changes you are making. Feel free to discuss this with your counselor for more information.

If you participate in couple's or family counseling, The Counseling Room adheres to a "no secrets" policy. This means the counselor will not keep information gathered in individual conversations (including phone or email) secret, especially if the information in some way violates the integrity of the counseling process.

Child Treatment Policy: The Counseling Room serves minors who are at least 12 years old. We believe that maintaining privacy is important in developing trust and the overall success of the counseling process. As such, it is the policy of The Counseling Room to share only general information about treatment status and progress with the legal guardians of minors under the age of 18. Information your child discloses to the counselor will not be shared with you without your child's permission. The only exception to this rule is: **if it is believed that your child is at serious risk of harming themselves or anyone else. If this occurs, the counselor will inform you immediately.** All minors wishing to engage in counseling, must be accompanied by their legal guardian. Proof of guardianship will be ascertained. The Counseling Room will not testify in court about custody or parenting plans.

Crisis Intervention: A crisis is any situation when you may feel overwhelmed by your thoughts, emotions, and behaviors. Crisis situations may be in the form of mental health concerns (e.g., psychosis, mania), natural disasters, school bullying, the sudden death of a loved one, loss of job, divorce, children leaving home, pregnancy, acts of violence, etc. Should this happen, the counselor will work with you to reduce and stabilize the overwhelming—and sometimes harmful--thoughts, emotions, and behaviors present during a crisis. Ideally, stabilization will happen within the time allotted for the counseling session (e.g., 1 hour). However, sometimes it may take longer to achieve stabilization. In such cases, a Baker Act process will be initiated.

When the Baker Act is initiated, a client is admitted into a hospital setting and is assessed by a psychiatrist or other medical professional. The purpose of the assessment is to determine how severe the overwhelming thoughts and emotions are, as well as develop a course of action to best restore stable functioning. Upon stabilization, the client will be discharged from the hospital setting and able to return home.

A detailed description of how The Counseling Room intervenes during crisis is documented in the *Crisis Intervention Protocol*. The counselor will review this document with you, and you must agree with the details in the protocol to engage in services with The Counseling Room LLC.

Ending Counseling: Normally, you are the one to decide when counseling ends. However, there are a few exceptions to the rule:

- The counselor lacks the training and skills necessary to appropriately address the concerns/problems you identify in counseling. In such cases, the counselor will inform you of this fact and will refer you to other counselors/counseling agencies who may better meet your needs.
- You are violent or threatening toward the counselor, the office space, and/or to the counselor's family, friends, and co-workers. In such case, The Counseling Room reserves the right to end counseling service unilaterally and immediately.
- You miss 2 or more sessions without a 24-hour notice. These sessions may or may not be consecutive. In either case, The Counseling Room reserves the right to terminate counseling services with you.
- The counselor's incapacitation or death.

Upon the completion of service (whether due to early termination or the end of the full length of recommended counseling services), the counselor will provide you with referrals for other sources of mental health care (if needed). Please be advised that The Counseling Room cannot guarantee that these sources will accept you for counseling should you decide to seek services.

You may discontinue services with the counselor at any time. It is highly recommended to develop a plan for discontinuation with the counselor prior to ending counseling.

Technology: Due to the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), services will be delivered virtually until further notice. This virtual delivery of services is a form of distance counseling called *telemental health*. To engage in telemental health, **you will need (1) reliable internet connection and (2) a cellphone, tablet, laptop, or computer with a front-facing camera so you can engage in video calls.** The counselor will use a HIPAA-compliant platform to coordinate these video-calls. You are not required to purchase any special software. In addition to having one of the electronic devices mentioned above, **you must also have a phone number and an email address.** During the first session, the counselor will discuss additional guidelines to adhere to when engaging in telemental health.

Expectations for confidentiality and its limitations in virtual counseling are the same as for in-person counseling (see *Confidentiality & Limitations of Confidentiality* section for details).

In the case of a mental/emotional crisis during session that does not resolve during the session's allotted time, a protocol will be followed. From the time the protocol is initiated to when it is completed, the counselor and the client's video call must remain open, and the client must always remain visible to the counselor. A detailed description of how The Counseling Room intervenes during crisis is documented in the *Crisis Intervention Protocol*.

The counselor will not facilitate sessions over telephone calls, text messages, or emails.

Telephone calls, text messages, and emails are reserved for asking simple questions, making scheduling arrangements, providing updates or reminders, etc.

Complaints: Please discuss any complaints or concerns with the counselor/owner of The Counseling Room LLC. If you feel the concern(s) was addressed in a disrespectful or non-professional manner, you also have the right to contact the counselor's licensing board. This information is in the *Professional Disclosure* form and will also be provided to you upon request.

Professional Consultations: Professional consultation is when the counselor speaks with other health professionals about your health needs. It is an important component of a healthy counseling practice. As such, your counselor will regularly participate in clinical, ethical, and legal professional consultations with appropriate professionals. If these consultations are with other professionals employed by The Counseling Room, your name and some other personally identifying information will be used. If these consultations are with individuals outside of The Counseling Room, identifying information about you will not be revealed, unless you sign a *Release of Information* form.

Children: Children under 12 who are not engaged in counseling, must be supervised outside of the counseling room (physical and/or virtual) by an adult during your sessions. **EXCEPTION:** If you are caring for an infant (birth to 6 months) or a child with special needs, then the child may be present with you during sessions. Because each situation is unique, the counselor reserves the right to adhere or amend this guideline at any time.

Cell Phones: Unless it is the device being used for the virtual counseling sessions, please refrain from using cell phones and other electronic devices during counseling sessions.

THANK YOU!