**Telecounseling Informed Consent**

Telecounseling refers to the provision of counseling services using technology while the counselor is in one place and the client/student is in a different location. There are several unique benefits and risks associated with telecounseling. The following information applies to telecounseling specifically, and does not negate or override any existing agreements in place.

**Credentials and Contact Information**

Degrees (provide links to the websites)

Licensure (provide links to the websites)

Certification (provide links to the websites)

Physical location of practice

Email Address

Phone Number

Practice website

**Benefits of Telecounseling**

* Accessibility—Telecounseling is especially well-suited for clients/students who have transportation issues or other factors that prevent them from leaving their homes. Telecounseling also provides clients/students with a wide range of provider options not limited to their specific geographic areas.
* Flexibility—Scheduling telecounseling sessions tends to be more flexible than face-to-face scheduling because there is no commute time, and counselors and clients/students can meet outside of regular business hours as needed and mutually agreed upon.
* Privacy and Comfort—Clients/students do not have to physically come to a counseling office in order to receive services.
* Effectiveness—Telecounseling is continually being researched, and initial studies support that telecounseling is as effective as in-person counseling services for clients/students concerns that are a good fit for this modality.

**Risks of Telecounseling**

* Risks to Confidentiality—Due to the nature of electronic communication, I cannot guarantee that our communication will remain confidential despite my best efforts to use updated encryption methods and antivirus software.
* Boundaries—Counselors avoid dual relationships with clients/students as much as possible. Clients/students should be mindful of what the counselor can observe in the background of their videos. The use of substances before or during session is strictly prohibited.
* Access Issues—We will decide together what type of telecounseling platform to use; clients/students are responsible to obtain access to a reliable device for communication and a secure network. Clients/students can access public telecounseling devices and networks at their local libraries, and they should take steps to ensure their privacy and confidentiality is maintained through use of a virtual private network (VPN), encryption, and/or password protection.
* Not Appropriate for All Clients/Students—Some clients/students might not be able to engage in telecounseling due to the nature and severity of client concerns, issues of access, or other unique circumstances. If I decide that telecounseling is no longer the best treatment option for you, we will discuss in-person counseling or referral options. You understand that referral services might not be available immediately.
* Crisis Response—Telecounseling is not a substitute for emergency services. We will develop an emergency response plan before engaging in telecounseling. Clients/students are responsible for seeking and securing their own emergency services despite any guidance or support offered by the counselor.
* Effectiveness—Although telecounseling has been found to produce effective results, it is quite different than in-person counseling, and some nonverbal communication might be lost.
* Technology Failure—Sometimes technology might fail. In the event of a lost connection during session, the counselor and client will log off, wait two minutes, and try to reconnect. If the connection fails again, the counselor will call the client on their permanent phone number. If the session is interrupted and you are in crisis, call 911/local police or go to your nearest emergency room. If a session is ended due to technological failure, you will be charged a prorated amount of actual session time and the session will be rescheduled.
* Time Zones—If we are located in different time zones, I will ensure that we are both informed of meeting times in our own time zones. Some appointments might need to be scheduled outside of typical business hours, and I will do my best to schedule at times that are convenient for you.
* Diversity—I work with diverse clients/students who hold various cultural values, native languages, and levels of ability. I will adjust telecounseling services according to your unique needs, and we will make alternative arrangements if telecounseling is not suitable.
* Third-Party Payers—not all insurance companies and other managed-care providers will reimburse for telecounseling services. We will work together to get an estimate of what will be reimbursed before beginning services, and you will be responsible for the full cost of session if the agreed-upon fee is not reimbursed by a third party as expected.

**Electronic Communication Policy**

I do not use social media for professional purposes. I do not communicate or connect with any clients/students through social media platforms. I have a website that you may access for information. You can access your personal information and get appointment reminders through the secure client portal. Login information will be sent to you via email. Posting about the nature of our relationship on any public site compromises your confidentiality. If I see you in person, I will not address you unless you acknowledge me first.

Email communication is best for logistical issues such as making and changing appointments and billing questions. Text messaging is not secure, so please email or call instead. I will return text messages with a phone call. I will respond to your messages within 8 business hours. Clients should call emergency services for any urgent needs.

**Fees**

The same fee structure applies to telecounseling as in-person counseling.

**Records**

I will maintain HIPAA- and FERPA-compliant records of our counseling relationship and your protected health information (PHI). I use encrypted email and a password-protected, encrypted telephone to communicate with you. I have a BAA on file for our telecounseling video platform and the electronic health record system. I retain confidential record of all written communication we exchange (including email and text) for seven years. Telecounseling sessions should not be recorded without the written consent of both counselor and client.

**Agreement**

You agree to inform me of your exact location and to confirm your identity before the start of every telecounseling session. Your identity will be confirmed using a government-issued ID at the first session, and we will use a code word to confirm your identity in subsequent sessions. Other individuals with authorized access to your PHI might include administrative professionals, supervisors, and information technologists, all of whom are HIPAA- and FERPA-compliant.

Clients/students should access the internet through cellular data, an Ethernet cable, or a personal password-protected wireless router. Clients/students should use a VPN on public wifi. Clients/students should use password-protected devices to access telecounseling services. Clients/students should encrypt their phones and tablets and email accounts and should not share their passwords or devices with others. Clients/students must have a safe and private location in which they can participate in telecounseling.

Your signature below indicates agreement with this policy. You may stop a session and/or withdraw your consent to receive telecounseling services at any time.

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Client/Student Date