

a t h e n s counseling c e n t e r

160 Tracy Street, Suite 14 • Athens, Georgia 30601 • 706-395-5345 • AthensCounselingCenter.com

INFORMATION, AUTHORIZATION, & CONSENT TO TREATMENT

I am very pleased that you have selected me to be your therapist, and I am sincerely looking forward to assisting you. This document is designed to inform you about what you can expect from me regarding confidentiality, emergencies, and several other details regarding your treatment. Although providing this document is part of an ethical obligation to my profession, more importantly, it is part of my commitment to you to keep you fully informed of every part of your therapeutic experience. Please know that your relationship with me is a collaborative one, and I welcome any questions, comments, or suggestions regarding your course of therapy at any time.

Background Information

The following information regarding my educational background and experience as a therapist is an ethical requirement of my profession. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

I received my Bachelor of Science in Accounting from Butler University in 1994. I received my Master of Science in Rehabilitation Counseling from Georgia State University in 2006.

I interned for Peachford Psychiatric Hospital in the Outpatient Dual Diagnosis addiction program. Upon graduation, I worked as a therapist/case manager for Northside Hospital Vistas Unlimited, a day program for clients with severe and persistent mental illness. I was then employed by Shepherd Center, a catastrophic care hospital, as a rehabilitation counselor in the post acute brain injury rehab center, Pathways. Upon moving to Athens in 2010, I entered private practice with Counseling Associates for Well-Being, before leaving to start my own practice, Athens Counseling Center in 2016.

Theoretical Views & Client Participation

It is my belief that as people become more aware and accepting of themselves, they are more capable of finding a sense of peace and contentment in their lives. However, self-awareness and self-acceptance are goals that may take a long time to achieve. Some clients need only a few sessions to achieve these goals, whereas others may require months or even years of therapy. As a client, you are in complete control, and you may end your relationship with me at any point.

In order for therapy to be most successful, it is important for you to take an active role. This means working on the things you and I talk about both during and between sessions. This also means avoiding any mind-altering substances like alcohol or non-prescription drugs for at least eight hours prior to your therapy sessions. Generally, the more of yourself you are willing to invest, the greater the return.

Furthermore, it is my policy to only see clients who I believe have the capacity to resolve their own problems with my assistance. It is my intention to empower you in your growth process to the degree that you are capable of facing life's challenges in the future without me. I also don't believe in creating dependency or prolonging therapy if the therapeutic intervention does not seem to be helping. If this is the case, I will direct you to other resources that will be of assistance to you. Your personal development is my number one priority. I encourage you to let me know if you feel that terminating therapy or transferring to another therapist is necessary at any time. My goal is to facilitate healing and growth, and I am very committed to helping you in whatever way seems to produce maximum benefit. I truly hope we can talk about any of these decisions. If at any point you are unable to keep your

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appointments or I don't hear from you for one month, I will need to close your chart. However, as long as I still have space in my schedule, reopening your chart and resuming treatment is always an option.

Confidentiality & Records

Your communications with me will become part of a clinical record of treatment, and it is referred to as Protected Health Information (PHI). Your PHI will be stored electronically with Therapy Appointment, a secure storage company who has signed a HIPAA Business Associate Agreement (BAA). The BAA ensures that they will maintain the confidentiality of your PHI in a HIPAA compatible secure format using point-to-point, Federally approved encryption. Additionally, I will always keep everything you say to me completely confidential, with the following exceptions: (1) you direct me to tell someone else and you sign a "Release of Information" form; (2) I determine that you are a danger to yourself or to others; (3) you report information about the abuse of a child, an elderly person, or a disabled individual who may require protection; or (4) I am ordered by a judge to disclose information. In the latter case, my license does provide me with the ability to uphold what is legally termed "privileged communication." Privileged communication is your right as a client to have a confidential relationship with a therapist. This state has a very good track record in respecting this legal right. If for some unusual reason a judge were to order the disclosure of your private information, this order can be appealed. I cannot guarantee that the appeal will be sustained, but I will do everything in my power to keep what you say confidential.

Please note that in couple's counseling, I do not agree to keep secrets. Information revealed in any context may be discussed with either partner.

All information that you provide during a session is confidential, other than to insurance companies or managed care companies (if you choose to use your insurance). The records that are created associated with your care are also private, but if you choose to use your insurance, they can be released to them.

**When you use your insurance, a psychiatric diagnosis must be assigned and transmitted to your insurance company, detailed clinical information often must be provided by your therapist, and in some cases total access to patient files often must be provided to insurance company employees. Often, insurance companies attempt to influence the methods or course of treatment so as to save money; this means treatment decisions will not be made by the therapist and client alone. Also, psychiatric diagnoses may affect your ability to obtain future health or life insurance and rates for that insurance.

Structure and Cost of Sessions

I agree to provide psychotherapy for the fee of \$125 for the 60-70 minute initial evaluation, \$110 per 55-60 minute session, and/or \$165 per 90 minute session, unless otherwise negotiated by you or your insurance carrier. Doing psychotherapy by telephone is not ideal, and needing to talk to me between sessions may indicate that you need extra support. If this is the case, you and I will need to explore adding sessions or developing other resources you have available to help you. Telephone calls that exceed 10 minutes in duration will be billed at a crisis rate of \$10 per minute. The fee for each session will be due at the conclusion of the session. Cash, personal checks, Visa, MasterCard, Discover, or American Express are acceptable for payment, and I will provide you with a receipt of payment. The receipt of payment may also be used as a statement for insurance if applicable to you. Please note that there is a \$30 fee for any returned checks.

All services provided will be charged directly to you, with the exception of those clients who choose to use their insurance or employee assistance program. In that case, your insurance company or EAP will be billed, and you will be asked to pay any coinsurance, and deductible amounts at the time service is rendered. Each individual is ultimately responsible for payment. We will make every effort to secure payment through your insurance, but in the event that we do not receive payment as expected from them, you will be billed and will be responsible for payment.

Insurance policies are a contractual agreement between you, the subscriber, and your insurance company. If you choose to use your insurance coverage, your coverage amounts, co-pays, deductibles, and your counselor's eligibility for reimbursement from your insurance company will all need to be verified by you prior to services being rendered, or full session fees will be charged until authorization and benefits are confirmed. We are happy to assist you as needed and will bill charges on your behalf. However, understand that you will ultimately be responsible for payment of coinsurance and deductibles as well as fees for any non-covered services.

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Cancellation Policy

Because I set aside your appointment time exclusively for you, I ask that you please give a minimum of 24 hours notice if you need to cancel or change your appointment. There will be a full session charge for appointments not kept or not cancelled according to the policy. Please note that insurance does not pay for missed appointments nor do these charges apply to your deductible. Emergencies will be considered, and we ask that you notify us of these as soon as possible to allow us an opportunity to offer your appointment to someone else.

Please check with your therapist regarding their policy about how to best contact them.

In Case of an Emergency

My practice is considered to be an outpatient facility, and I am set up to accommodate individuals who are reasonably safe and resourceful. I do not carry a beeper nor am I available at all times. If at any time this does not feel like sufficient support, please inform me, and we can discuss additional resources or transfer your case to a therapist or clinic with 24-hour availability. Generally, I will return phone calls within 24-48 hours. If you have a mental health emergency, I encourage you not to wait for a call back, but to do one or more of the following:

- Call Behavioral Health Link/GCAL: 800-715-4225
- Call Ridgeview Institute at 770-434-4567
- Call Peachford Hospital at 770-454-5589
- Call SummitRidge Hospital at 678-442-5858
- Call Lifeline at (800) 273-8255 (National Crisis Line)
- Call 911.
- Go to the emergency room of your choice.

Professional Relationship

Psychotherapy is a professional service I will provide to you. Because of the nature of therapy, our relationship has to be different from most relationships. It may differ in how long it lasts, the objectives, or the topics discussed. It must also be limited to only the relationship of therapist and client. If you and I were to interact in any other way, we would then have a "dual relationship," which could prove to be harmful to you in the long run and is, therefore, unethical in the mental health profession. Dual relationships can set up conflicts between the therapist's interests and the client's interests, and then the client's (your) interests might not be put first. In order to offer all of my clients the best care, my judgment needs to be unselfish and purely focused on your needs. This is why your relationship with me must remain professional in nature.

Additionally, there are important differences between therapy and friendship. Friends may see your position only from their personal viewpoints and experiences. Friends may want to find quick and easy solutions to your problems so that they can feel helpful. These short-term solutions may not be in your long-term best interest. Friends do not usually follow up on their advice to see whether it was useful. They may need to have you do what they advise. A therapist offers you choices and helps you choose what is best for you. A therapist helps you learn how to solve problems better and make better decisions. A therapist's responses to your situation are based on tested theories and methods of change.

You should also know that therapists are required to keep the identity of their clients confidential. For your confidentiality, I will not address you in public unless you speak to me first. I must also decline any invitation to attend gatherings with your family or friends. Lastly, when your therapy is completed, I will not be able to be a friend to you like your other friends. In sum, it is my ethical duty as a therapist to always maintain a professional role. Please note that these guidelines are not meant to be discourteous in any way, they are strictly for your long-term protection.

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Statement Regarding Ethics, Client Welfare & Safety

I assure you that my services will be rendered in a professional manner consistent with the ethical standards of the American Counseling Association. If at any time you feel that I am not performing in an ethical or professional manner, I ask that you please let me know immediately. If we are unable to resolve your concern, I will provide you with information to contact the professional licensing board that governs my profession.

Due to the very nature of psychotherapy, as much as I would like to guarantee specific results regarding your therapeutic goals, I am unable to do so. However, with your participation, we will work to achieve the best possible results for you. Please also be aware that changes made in therapy may affect other people in your life. For example, an increase in your assertiveness may not always be welcomed by others. It is my intention to help you manage changes in your interpersonal relationships as they arise, but it is important for you to be aware of this possibility nonetheless.

Additionally, at times people find that they feel somewhat worse when they first start therapy before they begin to feel better. This may occur as you begin discussing certain sensitive areas of your life. However, a topic usually isn't sensitive unless it needs attention. Therefore, discovering the discomfort is actually a success. Once you and I are able to target your specific treatment needs and the particular modalities that work the best for you, help is generally on the way.

Technology Statement

In our ever-changing technological society, there are several ways we could potentially communicate and/or follow each other electronically. It is of utmost importance to me that I maintain your confidentiality, respect your boundaries, and ascertain that your relationship with me remains therapeutic and professional. Therefore, I've developed the following policies:

Cell phones: It is important for you to know that cell phones may not be completely secure or confidential. However, I realize that most people have and utilize a cell phone. I may also use a cell phone to contact you. If this is a problem, please feel free to discuss this with me.

Email: Emailing is not secure means of communication and may compromise your confidentiality. I realize that many people prefer to email because it is a quick way to convey information. However, please know that it is my policy to utilize this means of communication strictly for appointment confirmations (nothing that could be inferred as therapy). Therefore, please do not bring up any therapeutic content via email to prevent compromising your confidentiality. If you do, please know that I will not respond. You also need to know that I am required to keep a summary or copy of all emails and texts as part of your clinical record that address anything related to therapy.

Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, Etc: It is my policy not to accept requests from any current or former clients on social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, etc. because it may compromise your confidentiality. I have a professional Facebook page. You are welcome to "follow" me on this professional page where I post counseling information. However, please do so only if you are comfortable with the general public being aware of the fact that your name is attached to Athens Counseling Center. Please refrain from making contact with me using social media messaging systems such as Facebook Messenger. These methods have insufficient security, and I do not watch them closely. I would not want to miss an important message from you.

Google, Bing, etc.: It is my policy not to search for my clients on Google or any other search engine. I respect your privacy and make it a policy to allow you to share information about yourself with me as you feel appropriate. If there is content on the Internet that you would like to share with me for therapeutic reasons, please print this material and bring it to your session.

Blogs: I may post counseling information on my professional blog. If you have an interest in following my blog, you are welcome to. However, please do so only if you are comfortable with the general public being aware of the fact that your name is attached to Athens Counseling Center

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Faxing Medical Records:

If you authorize me (in writing) via a "Release of Information" form to send your medical records or any form of protected health information to another entity for any reason, I may need to fax that information to the authorized entity. It is my responsibility to let you know that fax machines may not be a secure form of transmitting information. Additionally, information that has been faxed may also remain in the hard drive of my fax machine. However, my fax machine is kept behind two locks in my office. And, when my fax machine needs to be replaced, I will destroy the hard drive in a manner that makes future access to information on that device inaccessible.

Recommendations to Websites or Applications (Apps):

During the course of our treatment, I may recommend that you visit certain websites for pertinent information or self-help. I may also recommend certain apps that could be of assistance to you and enhance your treatment. Please be aware that websites and apps may have tracking devices that allow automated software or other entities to know that you've visited these sites or applications. They may even utilize your information to attempt to sell you other products. Additionally, anyone who has access to the device you used to visit these sites/apps, may be able to see that you have been to these sites by viewing the history on your device. Therefore, it is your responsibility to decide and communicate to me if you would like this information as adjunct to your treatment or if you prefer that I do not make these recommendations.

In summary, technology is constantly changing, and there are implications to all of the above that we may not realize at this time. Please feel free to ask questions, and know that I am open to any feelings or thoughts you have about these and other modalities of communication.

Our Agreement to Enter into a Therapeutic Relationship

I am sincerely looking forward to facilitating you on your journey toward healing and growth. If you have any questions about any part of this document, please ask.

Please print, date, and sign your name below indicating that you have read and understand the contents of this "Information, Authorization and Consent to Treatment" form as well as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Notice of Privacy Practices" provided to you separately. Your signature also indicates that you agree to the policies of your relationship with me, and you are authorizing me to begin treatment with you.

Client Name (Please Print)

Date

Client Signature

If Applicable:

Parent's or Legal Guardian's Name (Please Print)

Date

Parent's or Legal Guardian's Signature

My signature below indicates that I have discussed this form with you and have answered any questions you have regarding this information.

Therapist's Signature

Date

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