



Consent for Distance Counseling (Tele-Therapy)

Please **initial each box** as a written indication that you have read and understood the corresponding section.

Description:

Distance counseling (sometimes referred to as “tele-therapy”) utilizes Internet-based technology to provide counseling services. It involves any communication between client and counselor not occurring in a face-to-face format. This includes phone calls and voice messages, video conferencing, emails, and text messages.

Your first session will be via video conferencing to verify your identity and for you and your counselor to virtually “meet”. Then, you may choose which subsequent sessions are conducted via phone or video. Please note that email and text message exchanges are part of your services package, but actual counseling sessions are via phone or video only.

Differences between Tele-therapy and Traditional Counseling:

A large component of effective counseling is non-verbal communication: facial expressions, eye contact, voice inflections, gestures, and body language. Due to the way in which tele-therapy is provided (whether through telephone or video chat software), non-verbal communication is limited, thus sometimes leading to misunderstandings between client and counselor regarding the given topic of discussion. Please be patient with your counselor when clarification is sought. As with traditional counseling, audio or video recordings of the sessions are not permitted from either party. This is to protect privacy for both client and counselor.

Tele-therapy sessions are offered at the same durations as in traditional counseling: up to 90 minutes for initial and up to 50 minutes for follow-ups. This duration **includes** time necessary to connect to the online system, so please prepare your devices at least 10 minutes before your initial appointment and at least 5 minutes before any follow-up appointment to ensure you are receiving the full amount of time for your session.

We require 24 hours notice prior to your session’s start time should you need to cancel or reschedule the session, otherwise you will be billed accordingly.

Safety and Emergencies:

Online counseling is not suited for every client, particularly those with active self-harm urges, suicidal ideations, or homicidal ideations. Clients who are experiencing active psychotic symptoms may also require face-to-face services. Should we feel that the in-person format is a better option for you, we will chat with you about your options for most appropriate care.

If you are in a state of crisis or emergency, please call **1-800-273-TALK (8255)** for the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (and press 1 if you are a veteran), or text “HOME” to **741-741** for the Crisis Text Line. For Deaf or hard-of-hearing, please call **1-800-799-4TTY**.



Benefits:

Tele-therapy is often preferred for clients who may have barriers to treatment, such as transportation, childcare, scheduling, or psychosocial factors. Though we do our best to make accommodations for these barriers in our office-based services, sometimes the obstacles still interfere with clients being able to attend appointments.

This option may be requested for clients who are traveling for an extended period of time (i.e., at least 1 week) and would like to receive counseling services while away.

Distance counseling also affords the opportunity for non-local family members to participate in family counseling sessions (with their signed and verbal consent).

Potential Risks:

Tele-therapy poses potential risks due to the distance between client and counselor, as well as the electronic nature of the services. The most notable risk relates to confidentiality with online security. We have selected our service delivery systems to reduce these risks (see below); however, it is impossible to predict or prevent security breaches through hacking or unencrypted email.

It is also imperative that the client makes sufficient efforts to protect access to information, including but not limited to (1) strong passwords on all devices, (2) safe and trusted Internet usage, and (3) private physical locations to participate in the sessions.

Precautions:

To reduce the likelihood of the potential risks described above, we have carefully chosen several HIPAA-compliant systems. These systems have audio and video capability and are free to use for both client and counselor. Your information will be encrypted and stored on a secure server in compliance with HIPAA regulations. We are happy to help demonstrate how to download and use these systems at your request and **provide you with a comprehensive handout about these risks and safeguards from our trusted expert in online security.**

Payments:

We do not accept any insurance plans at this time. During your initial session, we'll request and securely store your credit card information. This will be used for all billing purposes, including initial and follow-up appointments, as well as in the event of a late cancelation in accordance with our billing policies.

We will initiate the communication for all sessions, whether conducted via phone or video conferencing. If we do not reach you right away, we will make a second attempt 10 minutes past your session's start time. If we do not reach you on the second attempt **and we do not receive communication** within 15 minutes past your session's start time, it is considered a no-show and will be billed accordingly. The best way to not incur a no-show charge is to let us know as soon as possible (via text message, email, or phone call) if you are having technical difficulties with the software so that we can make alternative arrangements for the session.



Notice of Privacy Practices

Confidentiality and the *Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act* (HIPAA):

Carolina Behavioral Counseling is responsible for preserving information obtained and keeping that information confidential, except as required by law (see below). In order for Carolina Behavioral Counseling to disclose any information regarding your treatment, a Release of Information form for *each entity* must be signed.

Confidentiality is crucial for maintaining a safe and healthy therapeutic relationship. However, in certain situations, mental health professionals are *required by law* to disclose information without your consent. Please read the following limits to confidentiality carefully and ask any questions that arise.

Carolina Behavioral Counseling is legally required to break confidentiality if:

- there is reasonable belief of imminent danger to harm yourself or others
- there is reasonable belief of abuse or neglect of a child, disabled adult, or elderly adult
- we are mandated to do so by an official court order from a judge

In these cases, and *these cases only*, information will be disclosed to the appropriate authorities, including emergency personnel, family members, and any intended victim(s) of harm. This is considered the “Duty to Warn.”

We will provide a copy of this Privacy Practices form at any time per your request if you would like one for your records.

Client Name (Please Print): _____

Client Signature: _____ Date of Completion: _____

By signing above I acknowledge that I have read and understand the questions asked, and that I have provided honest answers to the best of my knowledge. It is my responsibility to seek further clarification from Carolina Behavioral Counseling if necessary.