

THE GENTLE SHEPHERD COUNSELING CENTER'S INFORMED CONSENT FOR TELETHERAPY SERVICES

This informed consent for Teletherapy Services contains important information focused on providing therapeutic services using the phone or the Internet. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between you, your therapist, and The Gentle Shepherd Counseling Center (GSCC).

Benefits and Risks of Teletherapy

Teletherapy refers to providing therapeutic services remotely using telecommunications technologies, such as phone or video sessions. One of the benefits of teletherapy is that the client and therapist can engage in services without being in the same physical location. Teletherapy provides a level of convenience that in-person therapy does not. This can be helpful in ensuring continuity of care if the client or therapist cannot meet in person for any reason. Although there are benefits of teletherapy, there are some important differences between in-person therapy and teletherapy, as well as some risks. For example:

Risks to Confidentiality: Teletherapy sessions take place outside of the therapist's private office so there is potential for other people to overhear sessions if you are not in a private place. GSCC will take reasonable steps to ensure your privacy, but it is important for you to make sure that you find a private place for your session where you are alone, and where you will not be overheard or interrupted. It is also important for you to protect the privacy of your session on your cell phone or other device. Additionally, please ensure that you or other people walking by during your (video) session are appropriately dressed to avoid an embarrassing situation.

Issues Related to Technology: There are many ways that technology issues might impact teletherapy. For example, technology may stop working during a session, other people might be able to get access to our private conversation, or stored data could be accessed by unauthorized people or companies.

Crisis Management and Intervention: Typically, GSCC will not engage in teletherapy with clients who are currently in a crisis situation, requiring high levels of support and intervention. In any event, we will have an emergency response plan to address potential crisis situations that may arise during the course of our teletherapy sessions.

Electronic Communications

GSCC uses HIPPA compliant platforms for video sessions at no additional cost to you. You will need to have an electronic device that has audio and video capabilities for video sessions. You will also need a reliable Internet service. For communication between sessions regarding scheduling and payment, you will continue to call our main office at 330-499-3065. Email communication and text messaging can take place, with your permission, through the use of info@gentle-shepherd.com and through GSCC's text messaging system (typically used for administrative purposes only). In other words, email and text exchanges with our office should be limited to administrative matters such as setting and changing appointments, billing matters, and other related issues.

You should be aware that GSCC cannot guarantee the complete confidentiality of any information communicated by email or text. Therefore, GSCC will not discuss any clinical information by email or text, and we prefer that you do not either. Also, email and text correspondence may not be checked on a regular basis, so these methods **should not** be used if you are experiencing an emergency.

Treatment is most effective when clinical discussions occur at your regularly scheduled sessions. However, if an urgent issue arises, you should attempt to contact your therapist at GSCC at 330-499-3065. If you are unable to reach your therapist and feel that you cannot wait for him/her to return your call, please contact your primary care physician or the nearest emergency room and ask for the physician or psychiatrist on call. If your therapist is unavailable for an extended period of time, our office will provide you with the name of another GSCC therapist to contact in their absence, if necessary.

Confidentiality

GSCC and therapists have a legal and ethical responsibility to make the best efforts to protect all communications that are part of our use of teletherapy. However, the nature of electronic communications technologies is that GSCC cannot guarantee that your communications will be kept confidential or that other people may not gain access to our communications. GSCC will use updated and encrypted methods, firewalls, and back-up systems to help keep your information private, but there is a risk that your electronic communications may be compromised, unsecured, or accessed by others. You should also take reasonable steps to ensure the security of our communications (for example, only using secure networks for teletherapy sessions and having passwords to protect the device you use for teletherapy).

The extent of confidentiality and the exceptions to confidentiality are outlined in GSCC's general informed consent documents which are/were provided to you during your first session. These still apply in teletherapy. Please let us know if you have any questions about exceptions to confidentiality.

Appropriateness of Teletherapy

In order to provide phone or video sessions, you must be in the state of Ohio. You will be asked to provide your specific location at the beginning of your teletherapy session, to include the city, state and county of your location.

From time to time, an in-person session may be recommended in order to 'check-in' with your therapist. GSCC or your therapist will let you know if it is decided that teletherapy is not a good option to engage in at this time. If this is the case, options will be discussed for engaging in in-person counseling or referrals to another professional near you who can provide appropriate services.

Emergencies and Technology

Assessing and evaluating threats and other emergencies can be more difficult when conducting teletherapy than in traditional in-person therapy. To address some of these difficulties, you are required to create an emergency plan before engaging in teletherapy services. You must

identify an emergency contact person, who is near your location, who will be contacted in the event of a crisis or emergency. By executing this document, you are authorizing me to contact your emergency contact person, as needed, during such a crisis or emergency.

My emergency contact person is: _____

This person can be reached at: _____

If the session is interrupted for any reason, such as the failure of the technological connection, and you are experiencing an emergency, your therapist will make a reasonable attempt to contact you. It is recommended that you call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room if you are experiencing a life-threatening emergency. If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, other options for immediate care would include contacting the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255 or the Stark County Mobile Crisis Response Team at 330-452-6000. We can also discuss other local resources near you.

Non-emergency Interrupted Session Troubleshooting

If the session is interrupted and you are not experiencing an emergency, disconnect from the session and your therapist will attempt to re-contact you via the teletherapy method which was being utilized. If you do not hear back from your therapist within two (2) minutes, please call our main office at 330-499-3065. If there is a technological failure and we are unable to resume the connection, your therapist will attempt to call you to resume the session via phone. If this is not feasible, you will only be charged the prorated amount of the actual session time. **TIP:** If you are not plugged in, be sure your device is fully charged and/or be close to somewhere you can plug in.

Fees

The same session fee rates will apply for teletherapy sessions as for in-person therapy sessions. Most insurance companies will pay for phone and video sessions, and it is your responsibility to be informed of your insurance carrier's policy for teletherapy sessions. Please be aware that if your insurance lapses, you will be billed at our regular rate for these services.

Prohibition of Recordings

Teletherapy sessions shall not be recorded in any way unless agreed to in writing by mutual consent between you and your therapist. This is protected by law.

Documentation

Your therapist will maintain written documentation of the session in accordance with GSCC's policies.

Informed Consent

This agreement is intended as a supplement to GSCC's general informed consent, and it does not amend any of the terms of that agreement. Your signature below indicates agreement with GSCC's teletherapy informed consent.

Client or Parent/Guardian Signature

Date

Client's printed full name

Child's full name (if child is the client)

Therapist's Signature

Date