



“Peace, in simple terms.”

Counseling Services, PLLC

What You Need to Know About This Counseling Practice

This document will give you important information about the way this counseling office works. The information is important because things may not work exactly as you expect them to. For example, everything we talk about is confidential, but there are times where I may have to break that confidentiality without your permission. This document talks about the different reasons this might happen so that you are not surprised later on. We will also cover things like how I process your payments, how I protect your privacy, and how I keep your counseling records secure.

Going through this document is not only important but it is also required by law and ethical standards. Because we have to go through this paperwork anyway I did my best to make it as easy to read and understand as possible. If you have trouble with any of it I am also available to answer your questions as they come up.

What You Need To Do:

1. Read this document carefully.
2. At the bottom of each page is a small line labeled “Client Initials.” When you have finished reading a page just sign your initials to let me know you have read it.
3. If you have any questions as you go there is a space on the last page for you to write your questions so you don’t forget them before we meet.
4. *You don’t need to sign the last page when you’re finished.* Just bring the document in to your next counseling session and we will go over any questions you have and sign the document together.

Client Initials

What Counseling is Like

How Counseling Works – Counseling is basically a special kind of conversation. You (the client) will sit in my counseling office and talk to me about your problems and difficulties. My goal is to help you to figure out those problems and learn new and better ways to live. To put it simply, I'm trying to get you unstuck. The way I do my work depends specifically on what you need, but there are three general ways I try to help. 1) We will talk about your problems specifically and in depth so that we can both begin to figure out what exactly is wrong. 2) We will talk about new and different ways you can work with your problems to get you unstuck and move you towards the life you want to live. 3) We will talk about what it actually means to accept the things that you can't change, since not every problem can be solved.

The Benefits of Counseling – Counseling can help with all kinds of different problems. Here are some of the ways that counseling helps, according to mental health research and my own counseling experience:

- **Relief.** Talking about your problems with someone in depth can lead to a feeling of relief in some cases. It can help to get everything out in the open, especially in the safety of a counseling office.
- **Insight.** Counselors can help you to see your problems in new ways and answer some of those nagging questions. Figuring out 'why' can provide relief and give you a direction to walk in.
- **Education.** Counselors can teach you new skills and ideas that you can use for the rest of your life. When future problems come up you will be in a better place to work with them.
- **Confidence.** Even if your problems don't get better right away, it helps to know you have someone in your corner to strategize with and to talk through your feelings with. When you do start to make progress you will begin to trust in yourself more.
- **Acceptance.** Not every problem can be solved. This can lead to some real struggle. One of the strongest benefits of counseling is learning specifically how to make peace with the things in your life you can't change.

The Risks of Counseling – Because of the personal nature of counseling there is some personal risk involved that you should be aware of. The specific risks for counseling can include:

- Experiencing uncomfortable/unwanted emotions.
- Remembering unpleasant past events. I don't dig in to the past of my clients without specific purpose, but the past often has a way of being with us in the present in powerful ways.
- The accidental oversharing of information.
- Your problems may increase, temporarily or for the long-term. For example, if you struggle with sadness or suicidal thoughts there is always the chance that counseling can make that struggle worse instead of better. It doesn't happen often but it does happen, and it is important you know the risks.

It is important to make space in your life for the possibility of discomfort while going through counseling. Just as if you were undergoing a medical procedure, time may be needed for you to feel better and regain your balance after some of our sessions. Where possible try to make that space for yourself.

Client Initials

Fees & Payment Information

Session Fee

\$50

- A session lasts 60 clock minutes.
- Payment is expected when we have our session.
- I accept cash, personal checks, credit cards, and debit cards.
- I do not accept health insurance or Medicaid at this time.

If your payment is returned, such as with a returned check, a fee of \$50 will be added to your balance to cover the bank fees.

Getting a “Locked In” Rate

Sometimes a counselor will raise their session fees over time. To help keep your mind at ease and to keep your budget balanced I guarantee that I will not raise my session fee for any of my regular weekly clients. But there are some limitations and some things you should know about this guarantee.

- This guarantee does not apply to anyone paying a reduced rate.
- This guarantee does not apply to anyone who does not see me on a weekly basis.
- This guarantee does not apply to anyone who does not have a session with me for 30 days or more.

I do not plan on raising my session fees often or dramatically. If this guarantee does not cover you and I decide to raise my rate I will give you at least 30 days of notice so that you are not surprised and we can have plenty of time to talk about any of your concerns or questions.

Owing Money

Even though I expect your session fee when you come in for a session I know that sometimes things can happen to prevent that. Sometimes clients forget their wallets or a credit card is declined. Don't worry. I have a flexible policy for dealing with problems like this.

- If the session ends and it turns out that you can't pay you can make up the balance at our next session or we can make other arrangements (such as mailing in a payment or you coming back later to run a credit card through).
- But if you owe \$100 or more I will not be able to schedule your next appointment until the full balance is paid.
- If you owe \$100 or more and have not made a payment (or at least an attempt at payment) in 30 days I will contact you using the contact information I have for you on file to arrange payment. *I do not make use of collection agencies or similar services.*

Cancellation Policy – Sometimes things will come up and you will need to cancel an appointment. If that happens don't worry. I understand that life is unpredictable. Just give me as much notice as you can and usually it isn't a problem. Here are a few more things to keep in mind for when you need to cancel:

- If you cancel with less than 24 hours' notice for two different sessions in a 30 day period we will have to have a conversation. If you cancel with less than 24 hours' notice a third time you will be billed for that session as if you attended.
- If you do not show up for two sessions without contacting me prior we will have to have a conversation. If you do not show up for a third session without contacting me prior you will be billed for that session (and any missed sessions after) as if you attended.

Client Initials

Confidentiality

Protected Health Information (PHI) – Any information that I have about you as the client, including your identity, your personal information, notes of what takes place during sessions, and any related documents, communications, or materials are all considered to be *protected health information* (PHI). This means that there are special laws that protect the way that information is used. In general PHI is kept strictly confidential between me and you as the client, but there are times where I may have to break that confidentiality without your permission. This document is required by law to describe those limits to you so that you are not surprised. Limits to confidentiality may include:

Duty to Protect/Warn

- If the Client talks about abuse to a child (which includes physical harm, sexual activity or contact of any kind, and/or neglect) by law the Counselor is required to report this information to the relevant reporting agency (such as DCBS).
- If the Client talks about physical and/or sexual abuse in connection with the Client's legal spouse, an elderly person, or a person who is mentally ill to the point of being unable to defend themselves, by law this information must be reported by the Counselor to the relevant agency.
- If the Client makes a *credible* threat to commit a violent or harmful act against a specific person (including suicide) the Counselor is required to warn law enforcement and to take reasonable action to protect that threatened person.

Legal Situations

The Client's protected information may also be disclosed without the consent of the Client in certain legal situations:

- A court may issue an order or a subpoena for the Client's records or related testimony from the Counselor. Before the Client takes legal action they should carefully consider with their legal counsel the possibility of the Counselor and his records being.
- If the Client lodges a complaint against the Counselor the Client's protected information may be disclosed to the applicable governing body in order for the Counselor to defend himself.

Supervision & Collaboration

- Gregory Koprowski, LPCA, is under supervision by Dr. David Maynard, LPCC. As required by the rules of mental health counselor licensing the Supervisor has access to the Counselor's professional records and may receive other disclosures of the Client's protected information from the Counselor. The Supervisor is otherwise bound by all the same confidentiality requirements that bind the Counselor. (Basically my supervisor is there to make sure that I am working in a safe, professional, and legal manner in regards to you as my client.)
- There may also be times where it will be helpful for the Counselor to discuss the Client's case with other mental health professionals to gain feedback and insight. In such cases no records will be shared and no specific information beyond the general details of the case will be discussed.

In all these cases I will work to resolve each situation without disclosing any protected information when possible, and when it is not possible I will work to expose as little of your protected information as is strictly necessary.

Client Initials

Professional Records

To help me better take care of my clients I keep a folder of records for each person I see. These records are kept on paper and are stored in a secure double-locked file box I keep in my counseling office.

What the Records Contain

- The records include all paperwork filled out by my clients (which includes such things as the client's name, address, and emergency contact information).
- The records also contain notes written by me, the counselor, about individual sessions. This includes information on any progress made, treatment planning, client history, and things like that.
- The records will contain copies or originals of the results of all tests, assessments, or examinations done by the client to help with the counseling work.
- The records may also contain copies of any electronic communications that have taken place directly between me and a client. This includes transcripts of voicemails, e-mails, text messages, and messages exchanged through social media platforms. The more important the messages are to our counseling work the more likely they are to be printed out and stored.

Access

- The Practice maintains ownership of these records. If a counselor leaves the Practice these records will remain in the custody of the Practice. They may be digitized and stored in a password protected, encrypted, HIPAA compliant online file system to make them easier to maintain.
- Each client has the right to view their file unless I, as the counselor, believe that viewing their record will actually harm the client in some way.
- A client may request a complete copy of their records at any time. *A complete copy may only be given directly to the client, in person.* A client may receive one copy free-of-charge per year. Any additional copies will cost \$25 per copy to cover the costs of creating the copies. Just like above, I will not give such a copy if I think it will harm my client in any way.
- I do not give copies of complete client records to anyone but the client. If needed though I can create a summary of the client's records that can be used by other professionals (like a client's doctor, psychiatrist, or another counselor). A client may request one free summary per year. Each summary after that will cost \$25 to cover the costs of creating the summary. A summary may be given directly to another professional if the client signs the necessary release form.

Release of Information

Because of confidentiality concerns I can't talk to anyone about my clients (unless it falls in the categories listed on page 4 or page 7). That includes family members, spouses, and close friends of my clients. If a client wants me to talk to someone though, such as calling a doctor to answer questions about the client or keeping a spouse in the counseling loop, the client will need to sign a "release of information" form. This form details exactly what information the client wants me to share, when, and exactly who will receive this information. This form will also need to be completed if a client needs me to send documents to someone else, even if I am sending those documents to another professional like a doctor or a psychiatrist.

Client Initials

Professional Record Storage

There are two main ways that client records and Protected Health Information (PHI) are stored and protected by my counseling practice:

Physical Storage

How It Works: Any hard copy (paper-based) documents generated by the client and the practice will be stored in a physical file folder kept on the premises of the Practice. Refer to the “Professional Records” section of this document to see the kinds of information that may be stored in this way.

How It Is Protected:

- The storage box where the client’s file is located is locked with two separate combination locks.
- The box itself is also locked in the counseling office when the practice is not open, with keys held only by the building manager and the counselor who works at the practice.
- At night the office suite is also locked. Only the building manager and those who work in the office suite have keys to the suite.
- Security cameras are also present on the outside of the building.

Digitization of Records: It is possible that hard copy records may be scanned and stored electronically. The hard copy records may then be destroyed, providing that new hard copy records can be created with what has been electronically stored. After a client stops going to counseling the entire physical file of that client may be digitized. If so, the hard copies of that record will be destroyed.

Electronic Storage

How It Works: My practice makes use of an online storage service to maintain electronic client records. Documents related to the client’s record may be electronically generated (typed in to a computer) or created from scans of hard copy materials and stored online. Electronic records of the client are never shared with anyone else electronically (through “sharing,” e-mail, or other online delivery method).

How It Is Protected:

- The online storage service encrypts data while it is “in transit” (being sent through the internet to the storage service) and while the data is “at rest” (while it is stored on the server). The service uses 128-bit encryption (or better), password protection, and 2-step authentication.
- The online storage services has also signed a Business Association Agreement with me and my practice stating that they will abide by the same HIPAA compliance standards that my practice does.
- A Virtual Private Network (VPN) service is also used to add a second layer of encryption when transmitting or receiving items from the client’s record stored online. This creates “end-to-end” encryption so that not even the Internet Service Provider (ISP) used by my practice will be able to track this information in any meaningful way.
- The computer used to add or review documents stored using this online service is also password protected. No part of the client’s record is stored locally on any computer owned by me or my practice.

Client Initials

Contact and Communication

If you want to get in touch outside of the office there are some important things you need to know when it comes to keeping things confidential.

- **Out in Public** – It is possible that we may bump into each other out in public. If that happens I will not greet you or talk to you, because then people around us might know you are one of my clients. But if you greet me or talk to me first then I will take that as permission to talk to you.
- **Text-Based Communication** – This includes e-mails and text messages. I use password protection on all my devices and I have 128-bit encryption with my e-mail account. Electronic devices are unpredictable though and sometimes people might still be able to access our electronic conversations even with all my precautions. I only use e-mail and text messages to take care of things like scheduling, giving instructions to new clients, or arranging for payments. I do not discuss sensitive information about you or our counseling work using e-mail or text messages.
- **Social Media** – For my counseling practice I use a few different social media platforms (such as Facebook and Google) as a way of spreading news and information about what I do. You do not need to interact with me on any of these social media platforms. Everything I post is for informational purposes only. Because it is very difficult to protect your personal information and confidentiality in those spaces I discourage all my clients (and even perspective clients) from talking to me in those spaces, interacting with my posts, or even doing something as simple as clicking “like.” I also decline or ignore all “friend requests” or similar requests to connect using social media.
- **Business Review Sites** – Some websites and services allow people to rate businesses and/or leave reviews about businesses. If you comes across me or my counseling practice on any of those kinds of business review websites that should *not* be understood as a request for a testimonial, rating, or endorsement from you. Similar to the section above, I discourage my clients from interacting with me through any social media platform as it becomes almost impossible to protect your confidentiality in those situations.

Emergencies

- **Emergency Services** – My counseling practice does not offer any kind of emergency services and I should not be used as an emergency contact. If you have an emergency you should call 911 or contact a local emergency response team.
- **Emergency Care** – In the event of an emergency, mental health threat, or urgent medical need I may call an ambulance to take you to the hospital for medical and/or psychiatric care. I will also contact the people listed as “emergency contacts” in your records to let them know what’s going on.
- **Safe Transport** – If you come to my office in a state where I believe it would be unsafe for you to leave (such as coming to session under the influence of a substance that would make you unsafe to drive) I will notify your emergency contacts listed in your records in order to arrange safe transportation. If you attempt to leave in such a situation I may also contact the police.

Client Initials

Finalization & Signature

Questions posed by Client, and answers given by Counselor:

Did the Client agree to receive counseling
freely?

Yes / No

In the Counselor's estimation, was the Client
mentally capable and competent to give
consent?

Yes / No

Explain:

I (the "client") have read and understand the above document, have had an opportunity to ask questions about this information and received satisfactory answers, and I consent to counseling, mental health assessment, evaluation, and/or testing. I also attest that I have the right to consent for counseling, mental health assessment, evaluation, and/or testing. I understand that I have the right to ask questions of my Counselor about the above information at any time.

Signature of Client or Legal Representative of Client

Date

Signature of Counselor

Date