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Information, Authorization, and Consent to Treatment

This notice outlines our policies and procedures and describes how psychological and medical information about you may be used and disclosed and how you can get access to this information. Please review it carefully.

Welcome to Focus Forward Counseling and Consulting, Inc. (FFCC). The following document is intended to offer an overview of services, policies regarding confidentiality, what you can expect from your experience with FFCC, and several other policies related to the provision of care. This document serves as informed consent, a crucial part of ethical and responsible counseling. It is vital that clients make informed decisions about their counseling experience and we hope that you will be fully informed about all parts of your therapeutic experience. If at any time you have questions or comments pertaining to your counseling please do not hesitate to voice them.

Theoretical Views & Client Participation

It is FFCC's stance that change takes place within the context of a therapeutic alliance. That is, positive therapeutic outcomes generally require a solid working relationship between client and counselor. Research has consistently demonstrated that the therapeutic alliance is a strong predictor of change in counseling. Towards this end, both parties have a responsibility for promoting positive outcomes. Counselors must adhere to a strict code of ethics that includes promoting clients' autonomy, keeping one's promises to clients, working towards beneficial outcomes, avoiding harm, and promoting justice. As the client, it is helpful for you to take an active role in your own therapeutic process. This includes regularly attending scheduled appointments and giving a good faith effort to work on therapeutic issues both inside and outside of the counseling sessions. This also entails the absence of consuming mind-altering substances for a minimum of eight hours prior to your counseling sessions. In general, counseling works on a simple premise: the more energy that you are willing to commit to the process the greater the likelihood of positive outcomes.

Records & Confidentiality

Your communications with your counselor will become part of a clinical record of treatment, and it is referred to as Protected Health Information. Your counselor will always keep everything you say confidential with the following exceptions: (1) you direct your counselor to tell someone else and you sign a "Release of Information" form; (2) your counselor determines that you are a danger to yourself or to others; (3) you report information about the abuse or neglect of a child, an elderly person, or a disabled individual who may require protection; or (4) your counselor is ordered by a judge to disclose information. In the latter case, your counselor's license provides him or her 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 psychologist or counselor. If for some unusual reason a judge were to order the disclosure of your private information, this order can be appealed. We cannot guarantee that the appeal will be sustained, but we will do everything in our power to keep what you say confidential.

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As part of a multidisciplinary treatment team we value collaboration amongst professionals working within FFCC. From time to time we will staff cases and engage in peer supervision to enable counselors to gain greater insight into their clients' needs with the aim of promoting more effective clinical outcomes. All members of FFCC are bound to the same strict rules of confidentiality as your individual counselor. If it appears to be in your best interest for us to collaborate with persons not directly affiliated with FFCC we will ask for your consent to communicate with them through a release of information; you always have the option to decline the request.

Please note that in couples counseling, your counselor does not agree to keep secrets. Information revealed in any context may be discussed with either partner. Records will not be released to either member of the couple without the signed consent of both persons. Furthermore, your counselor will not release any information on behalf of either party without the consent of both.

If you have any questions about confidentiality please ask.

Mental Health Insurance

In order to bill your insurance company FFCC must provide a psychiatric diagnosis on your behalf. Disclosure of confidential information is required by your health insurance carrier or HMO/PPO/MCO/EAP in order to process the claims; in some instances background information on your case, a treatment plan, and certain other information may be requested; in rare cases a copy of your entire counseling record may be requested by the insurer. FFCC has no control or knowledge over what insurance companies do with the information that is submitted or who has access to this information. You must be aware that submitting a mental health invoice for reimbursement carries a certain amount of risk to confidentiality, privacy, or to future capacity to obtain health or life insurance. The risk stems from the fact that mental health information is likely to be entered into insurance companies' computers and is likely to be reported to the Medical Information Bureau (MIB), a national data bank. MIB is a membership organization of life insurance companies. When you apply for life, health, or disability insurance, the company makes a report to MIB, and it receives any information that MIB may have on you. Psychiatric conditions might affect your future insurability or admission to the military.

We encourage you to carefully weigh the economic benefits of using insurance against the privacy risks that arise from sharing the information described above. You will maintain much greater control over potentially sensitive details of your life by paying privately for services.

Finally, efforts to verify your insurance coverage and authorize your visits have been made by FFCC in good faith. In spite of our best efforts, we receive incorrect information from insurance companies at a frequent rate. Therefore, it is in your best interest to interact with your insurance carrier to ensure that verification information is correct. Ultimately, you are responsible for the fee.

Structure and Cost of Sessions

Your counselor agrees to provide counseling for the fee of \$130 per 45-50 minute session, \$195 per 75 minute session, and/or \$100 per 90 minute group counseling session, unless otherwise negotiated by you or your insurance carrier. Conducting counseling by telephone is not ideal, and needing to talk to your counselor between sessions indicates that you probably need extra support. If this is the case, you and your counselor will need to explore adding sessions or developing other resources you have available to help you. The fee for each session will be due at the beginning of the session. Cash,

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personal checks, debit cards, and credit cards are acceptable for payment, and we 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 \$25 fee for any returned checks.

Collection Policy

Due to billing costs, there will be a \$10 service charge for non-payment of co-pay at the time of service. It is our policy to collect all debts including bad checks and we reserve the right to use a collection agency to collect outstanding debts and the right to terminate services. Reasonable collection and/or attorneys fees may be incurred for the collection of unpaid balances. In the event collection services are utilized, protection of private information is not guaranteed.

Late Cancellation /Missed Session Policy

In the event that you are unable to keep an appointment, you must notify your counselor at least two business days in advance. If such advance notice is not received, you will be financially responsible for the session you missed. Please note that insurance companies do not reimburse for missed sessions and you will be assessed a session fee of \$65.

Reports and Letters

We will be happy to provide a written report, a letter, or other correspondences at your request. In most cases, reports must be paid for in advance. Please discuss this policy with your counselor.

Record Keeping

If you request that we copy records to forward to another professional, there is a minimum charge of \$45 (payable in advance) for this service. The charge may be higher depending on the size of the file.

Medicaid Policy

In the event a Medicaid patient is not eligible for Medicaid coverage for any given month, the parent or guardian will be responsible for the payment of any services rendered during the inactive period and unpaid balances will be subject to our collection policies.

In Case of an Emergency

Focus Forward Counseling and Consulting, Inc. is considered to be an outpatient facility, and we are set up to accommodate individuals who are reasonably safe and resourceful. We are not available at all times. If at any time this does not feel like sufficient support, please inform your counselor, and he or she can discuss additional resources or transfer your case to a doctor or clinic with 24-hour availability. Generally, your counselor will return phone calls within 24-48 hours. If you have a mental health emergency, we encourage you not to wait for a call back, but to do one or more of the following:

- Call Ridgeview Institute at 770.434.4567 or Peachford Hospital at 770.454.5589.
- Call the Georgia Crisis and Access Line at 1.800.715.4225.
- Call 911.
- Go to your nearest emergency room.

Professional Relationship

Counseling is a professional service we will provide to you. Because of the nature of counseling, your relationship with your counselor 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

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counselor and client. If you and your counselor were to interact in any other ways, you would then have a "dual relationship" which could prove to be harmful to you in the long run and be considered unethical in the mental health profession.

Dual relationships can set up conflicts between the counselor'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 our clients the best care, your counselor's judgment needs to be unselfish and purely focused on your needs. This is why your relationship with your counselor must remain professional in nature.

Additionally, there are important differences between counseling 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 counselor offers you choices and helps you choose what is best for you. A counselor helps you learn how to solve problems better and make better decisions. A counselor's responses to your situation are based on tested theories and methods of change.

You should also know that counselors are required to keep the identity of their clients secret. As much as your counselor would like to, for your confidentiality he or she will not address you in public unless you speak to him or her first. Your counselor also must decline any invitation to attend gatherings with your family or friends. Lastly, when your counseling is completed, your counselor will not be able to be a friend to you like your other friends. In sum, it is the duty of your counselor 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.

Statement Regarding Social Media and Electronic Communications

Please note that counselors do not accept Facebook friend requests, Twitter or Google+ Circle invitations, nor LinkedIn requests. Rest assured that this is not personal. As stated above, we attempt to avoid dual relationships when possible. Should you choose to follow our business pages on Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn you are welcome to do so but please note that these are public pages and we cannot guarantee the confidentiality of your information.

It is very important to be aware that computers and email communication can be relatively easily accessed by unauthorized people and hence can compromise the privacy and confidentiality of such communication. Faxes can easily be sent erroneously to the wrong address. Emails, in particular, are vulnerable to unauthorized access due to the fact that Internet servers have unlimited and direct access to all emails that go through them. It is important that you be aware that emails, faxes, and important texts are part of the medical records. Additionally, your therapist's emails and texts are not encrypted. Your therapist's computers are equipped with a firewall, a virus protection, and a password and s/he also backs up all confidential information from his/her computers on a regular basis. Please notify your therapist if you decide to avoid or limit in any way the use of any or all communication devices such as email, cell phone, texts, or faxes.

If you communicate confidential or private information via email or texts your therapist will assume that you have made an informed decision, will view it as your agreement to take the risk that such communication may be intercepted, and will honor your desire to communicate on such

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matters via email. Unless we have agreed otherwise, please do not use email, texts, phone messages, or faxes for emergencies.

Statement Regarding Ethics, Client Welfare & Safety

FFCC assures you that our services will be rendered in a professional manner consistent with the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association and American Counseling Association. Also, sometimes your counselor may use a type of therapeutic intervention involving experiential exercises. Any intervention or process is entirely voluntary and may be discontinued at any time. However, it is your responsibility to communicate your feelings to your counselor in order for him or her to honor your decision.

If at any time you feel that your counselor is not performing in an ethical/professional manner, we ask that you please let him or her know immediately.

As much as we would like to guarantee specific results regarding your therapeutic goals, we are unable to do so. However, together with your counselor, we will work to achieve the best possible results for you. Please also be aware that changes made in counseling may affect other people in your life (e.g., an increase in your assertiveness may not always be welcomed by others). It is our 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 counseling 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 your counselor are able to target your specific treatment needs and the particular modalities that work the best for you, help is generally on the way.

We sincerely look forward to helping you along your therapeutic experience. If you have any questions about any part of this document, please ask your counselor.

Group Affiliation

I work with a group of independent mental health professionals, under the name Focus Forward Counseling and Consulting, Inc. This group is an association of independently practicing professionals which share certain expenses and administrative functions. While the members share a name and office space, I want you to know that I am completely independent in providing you with clinical services and I alone am fully responsible for those services.

Please initial that you have read this page _____

ACCEPTANCE OF POLICIES, CONSENT FOR TREATMENT, ASSIGNMENT OF BENEFITS AND INFORMATION RELEASE:

I have read and do understand the contents of this form and agree to the policies of my relationship with my counselor and am authorizing my counselor to begin treatment with me. Further, FFCC may file on my behalf for payment of services with my insurance company and receive payment for these services directly. I agree that FFCC may release any and all records to my insurance company or payor as requested for the processing of my claim for services.

Please print, date, and sign your name below indicating that you have read and understand the contents of this form.

Client name (please print)

Date

Client signature

Date

If Applicable:

Parent's or Legal Guardian's name (please print)

Date

Parent's or Legal Guardian's signature

Date

The signature of the counselor below indicates that she or he has discussed this form with you and has answered any questions you have regarding this information.

Counselor's signature

Date

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