

# Austin Counseling Center

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## Client Agreement/Informed Consent for Minors

### Overview:

Austin Counseling Center (ACC) is an independent agency, and has no relationship with any managed care or insurance company. We do not accept third party reimbursement and are therefore under no obligation to such entities with regard to client services or information. Our psychotherapy services are offered to individual adults, couples, families, and children, usually on a once-per-week basis. We also periodically offer group psychotherapy for a variety of different issues.

### Services Offered:

Our psychotherapy services are typically offered on a once-per-week basis. Although there are many definitions and philosophies of psychotherapy, and each of our therapists will offer their own unique approach to treatment in unison with your goals, desires and preferences, the following is a brief description of ACC's philosophy of the services we provide:

*Psychotherapy in its broadest definition is about growth. It is about living more authentically and autonomously by removing defenses and other "survival" responses that were developed during one's life, most often in childhood. One goal of therapy is to replace these functional, yet no longer appropriate, patterns with responses that are more congruent with the individuals' present life and social environment. During the initial stages of therapy, an understanding of the process and a beginning awareness of the underlying issues take place.*

*During the intermediate stages of psychotherapy, the initial awareness and understanding progress to a more active status, in which old patterns begin to be replaced with more appropriate, healthy responses. Functionality increases, while negative emotional responses and behaviors decrease.*

*A client becoming increasingly able to continue the growth process on their own designates the final stages of therapy. They in essence, and again to varying degrees, become their own therapist. The safety and support of the therapeutic medium has been replaced with an internal autonomy and authenticity, allowing them to face their own issues, and adjust their psychological course as necessary and desired.*

### Confidentiality:

I understand that Texas state law requires that information provided to mental health practitioners remain confidential, and ACC makes every effort to ensure confidentiality is maintained with respect to all aspects of your treatment. As an ACC client, you agree to the following exceptions to confidentiality, in which case information may be disclosed to the appropriate authorities/agencies/individuals:

- If your therapist has reason to believe that you may harm yourself or others.
- If your therapist has reason to believe that you are involved in or have knowledge of abuse or neglect of a child; or abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a person who is elderly or has a disability.
- Ordered disclosure by state or federal courts.

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In addition, ACC requires disclosure of information in the following circumstances:

- A signed release form granting permission to designated third parties to receive information (as needed).
- Discussion of the case with your therapist's clinical supervisor, as well as anonymous discussion with peer therapists at ACC.
- In the case of minors, parents or legal guardians have access to their child's records, unless emancipated.

In the rare case that emails or text messages are exchanged between therapist and client with therapy related discussions, confidentiality is not guaranteed but will be protected to the best of our ability.

## **Appointment Scheduling/Attendance/Cancellation:**

The primary service offered by ACC is weekly psychotherapy. The time and day of your appointment should be coordinated with your therapist.

*Regular psychotherapy promotes faster healing and progress, so it important that you attend your scheduled therapy session consistently. The agency policies are outlined below.*

- If I cannot attend a session, I agree to notify my therapist at least 24 hours in advance whenever possible.
- I understand that I will be charged for any session cancelled with less than 24-hours notice.
- Your therapist reserves the right to transfer/terminate services at any time, for any reason they consider therapeutically appropriate.

*There are policies/procedures in place allowing for exceptions to the above policy. Please discuss any concerns or special circumstances you may have with your therapist. Please note that exceptions to the above attendance policy do not necessarily relieve responsibility for payment of those sessions.*

If your therapist is involved in an emergency, please be aware that one of the other therapists at Austin Counseling Center will contact you to make future arrangements.

## **Length and number of sessions:**

Sessions typically last 50 minutes. They are expected to begin promptly, and end at the scheduled time. Although it is understood that there may be instances when you arrive late for a session, late arrival will not extend the scheduled ending time for the session. Your therapist is also expected to be on time, and will offer appropriate remedy if late, such as making the time up, prorating the fee, etc. The total number of sessions is dependent on a number of factors including your goals, timeframe, rate of progress, etc. It should be noted again that psychotherapy resulting in lasting change is often a long-term process, lasting several months or longer. Please discuss any issues/concerns you have with your therapist so that an appropriate treatment plan can be formulated which will best suit your needs/desires.

## **Fee/Payment:**

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ACC strives to serve everyone in the Central Texas area who need and desire our services. Your fee for service will be determined by your therapist. With regard to payment for services:

- Payment is due at the time of service delivery.
- I agree to pay a \$20.00 service charge for each check that is returned to ACC.
- If my therapist and I have arranged payment based on a sliding scale, I agree to notify my therapist of changes in my income or household size that could affect my fee.

## **Risks of Counseling:**

There are certain risks associated with the counseling process that should be understood before work progresses. These risks are sometimes associated with lack of knowledge regarding the therapeutic process, while most, when experienced, are direct consequences of positive therapeutic movement. Some of the more common risks that you should be aware of are:

- Long-lasting psychological change often requires a significant investment of time, often longer than a client's initial perception.
- Clients often experience deterioration in emotional and psychological stability at different times during the therapeutic process. This often occurs during the beginning stages of therapy, but may occur at any point, often brought on by an awareness of previously unconscious, emotionally-laden material.
- Relationships are often affected as a result of therapy. Significant relationships will often experience varying degrees of tension. This is often the most prevalent within family relationships, but may extend beyond into one's social and professional life.

## **Therapeutic Relationship:**

The relationship between therapist and client is the container through which client change can take place. As such, it is often one in which close emotional bonds develop. It is also a professional relationship, in which appropriate boundaries must be maintained. For the most part, the therapeutic relationship begins and ends at the therapy office. Although this is sometimes difficult to understand, it is a necessary requirement for maintenance of the therapeutic environment. As such, your therapist cannot be expected to be involved in a social relationship or friendship of any kind that exists outside of the therapy room.

## **Therapist Orientation and Credentials:**

There are many different approaches to the therapeutic process. Your therapist will work with you to provide you with the most appropriate interventions for your particular issue(s)/goals. Please discuss any concerns or questions you have regarding your treatment with your therapist at any time during the process.

## **Confidentiality With Regard To Minors:**

The parents or legal guardians of ACC clients under the age of 18 have the right to access their child's psychological records. The exception to this is in the case of an emancipated minor. A minor is emancipated if he or she is on active duty with the armed services, is married, or is 16 years of age or older and resides separate and apart from his/her parents, managing conservator, or guardian and manages his/her own financial affairs. Your child's therapist will discuss with you the limitations, procedures, and implications with regard to your child's records and progress.

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The parents should be aware that the therapist is not a conduit of information from the client. Psychotherapy can only be effective if there is a trusting a confidential relationship between the therapist and the client. Although the parents can expect to be kept up to date as to the client's progress in therapy, he/she will typically not be privy to detailed discussions between the therapist and the client. However, the parents can expect to be informed in the event of any serious concerns the therapist might have regarding the safety or well-being of the client, including suicidality.

## **Termination of Therapy:**

The therapist reserves the right to terminate therapy at her discretion. Reasons for termination include, but are not limited to, untimely payment of fees, failure to comply with treatment recommendations, conflicts of interest, failure to participate in therapy, the client needs are outside of the therapist's scope of competence or practice, or the client is not making adequate progress in therapy. The client (or the parents if the client is a minor) has the right to terminate therapy at his/her discretion. Upon either party's decision to terminate therapy, the therapist will generally recommend that the client participate in at least one, or possibly more, termination sessions. These sessions are intended to facilitate a positive termination experience and give both parties an opportunity to reflect on the work that has been done. The therapist will also attempt to ensure a smooth transition to another therapist by offering referrals to the client.

## **Grievance/Complaint:**

I understand that I have the right to file a confidential grievance if I have an unresolved concern regarding my therapy/therapist, or any issue involving any representative of ACC. Any grievance should be in written form and addressed to:

Executive Director  
Austin Counseling Center  
1000 Westbank Drive, Suite 6-250  
Austin, Texas 78746

For complaints involving post-graduate and licensed therapists, you may also contact the appropriate licensing board listed below:

- Texas State Board of Examiners of Professional Counselors (512) 834-6658
- Texas State Board of Examiners of Marriage & Family Therapists (512) 834-6657
- Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners (512) 834-6677
- Mailing address for all: 1100 West 49<sup>th</sup> Street, Austin, TX 78756

## **After Hours Policy/Procedure:**

If you need to contact your therapist at any time, you may do so by leaving a message on their confidential voice mailbox at ACC. If needed, you should discuss other alternative means of contact with your therapist. **If you are in crisis, please call the 24-hour crisis hotline at 472-HELP or 911.** ACC is not a crisis facility and will not be held responsible for any damages occurring as a result of unmet crisis or acute care needs. Your therapist may not be available to respond to emergency situations. **If you need immediate assistance, please contact the hotline at 472-4357 or 911.**

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I understand and agree to these policies in the Client Agreement / Informed Consent.

Names of children: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_