COUNSELING & PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES AGREEMENT

Welcome to the Oklahoma Christian University Counseling Center. This document (the Agreement) contains important information about our professional mental health, counseling and psychological services, as well as our business policies. It also contains summary information about the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), a federal law that provides privacy protections and patient rights with regard to the use and disclosure of your Protected Health Information (PHI) used for the purpose of treatment, payment, and health care operations. HIPAA requires that we (Counseling Center staff) provide you with a Notice of Privacy Practices (the Notice) for use and disclosure of PHI for treatment, payment and health care operations. The Notice, which is attached to this Agreement, explains HIPAA and its application to your personal health information in greater detail. **The law requires that we obtain your signature acknowledging that we have provided you with this information.** Although these documents are long and sometimes complex, it is very important that you read them carefully. You can discuss any questions you have about this Agreement, HIPAA and issues related to confidentiality, procedures and/or treatment with your counselor or the Director of University Counseling Services (UCS). **When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between your counselor and you.** You may revoke this Agreement in writing at any time. That revocation will be binding on you counselor unless she/he has taken action in reliance on it; if there are obligations imposed on your counselor by your health insurer (if used) in order to process or substantiate claims made under your policy; or if you have not satisfied any financial obligations you have incurred.
COUNSELING & PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

The OC University Counseling Center provides short-term, goal-oriented counseling/psychotherapy and psychological services to students, staff, and faculty. Counseling/psychotherapy is not easily described in general terms, it varies depending on the personalities of the counselor/psychologist and individual as well as the particular problems the person is experiencing. There are many different methods that can be used to help you deal with the problems and concerns that you hope to address. Psychotherapy is not like a medical doctor visit, it calls for a very active effort on your part. In order for the therapy to be most successful, you will have to work on things both during and between sessions.

Psychotherapy has benefits as well as risks. Psychotherapy has been shown to have many benefits may lead to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. Therapy can often times involve discussing unpleasant aspects of your life and as a result you may experience uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. With that said there are no guarantees of what you will experience.

The first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs/concerns and depending on those needs/concerns you may be asked to complete additional psychological assessments. These will be used by your counselor to understand your concerns and then to establish counseling goals based on your needs and/or problems. By the end of the initial evaluation, your counselor will be able to offer you some first impressions of what counseling will involve, goals for counseling, and a treatment plan to follow if you decide to continue with therapy. You should evaluate this information along with your own feelings and decide whether or not you feel comfortable working with your counselor.

Therapy involves a commitment of time, energy, and at times money, so it is important that you are comfortable with your counselor. If you have questions or concerns about counseling or any procedures please discuss them with your counselor as soon as they arise. If you feel your counselor or the counseling process is not helpful, your counselor will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.
COUNSELING SESSIONS

Counseling normally involves an initial evaluation of your concerns and an ongoing evaluation to determine the effectiveness of services to you. During the initial evaluation you and your counselor will decide if the OC University Counseling Center (UCC) is the best place to assist you in meeting your treatment goals. Your counselor will usually schedule one session (45-50 minutes duration) per week at a time you both agree on, although some sessions may be longer or more frequent. Once an appointment hour is scheduled you will be expected to attend the session or provide the UCC advance notice of cancellation by phone (425-5250) or by emailing your counselor. If you are more than fifteen minutes late you will have to reschedule and you will also be charged $5.00. Please remember that there are a limited number of counseling appointments available each week. If you are unable to attend a scheduled counseling session the cancellation notice allows us the opportunity to schedule times with other students.

PROFESSIONAL FEES

The University Counseling Center offers short-term counseling. The initial session is free, each individual session thereafter is $10.00/session for sessions 2-6, $15.00/session for sessions 7-11, $20.00/session for sessions 12-16, and $25.00/session for sessions 17 and beyond. If additional counseling or psychological services are needed the staff of the UCC will determine if the needed services are within the scope of the UCC mission. If it is determined that your needs are beyond the scope of the UCC, you will be given referral information concerning services available in the community. If it is determined that your needs are within the scope of the UCC mission, an hourly fee per session will be charged. Group counseling sessions will continue to be free of charge. You will be able to make payment in cash, check or on your student account. Please be advised that if charge is added to student account, this fee will show up as a counseling center fee on your OC financial statement. No student will be denied services based on ability to pay.

Psychological and educational testing services are charged separately; however, you will be made aware of any charges prior to any tests being given. Other services may include but are not limited to report writing, telephone conversations, consultations with other professionals, preparation of records or treatment summaries, and the time spent performing other services pertinent to counseling.
CONTACTING YOUR COUNSELOR

Due to the nature of professional university counseling services, your counselor may often not be immediately available by telephone. The Counseling Center is normally open from 8am to 4:30pm Monday – Friday. Your counselor will provide you with information should you need to reach them in an emergency. Your counselor will make every effort to return your call on the same day you make it, with the exception of weekends and holidays. If you are difficult to reach, please inform your counselor of some times when you will be available. If you are unable to reach your counselor and feel that it is an emergency, contact your family physician or the nearest emergency room. You may also contact your Hall Director or campus security (425-5500).

LIMITS ON CONFIDENTIALITY

The law protects the privacy of all communications between a patient and a psychologist/mental health profession. In most situations your counselor can only release information about your treatment to others if you sign a written authorization form that meets certain legal requirements imposed by HIPAA. There are other situations that only require your advance written consent, your signature on this agreement provides consent for the following:

- Your counselor may occasionally find it helpful to consult other health and mental health professionals about a case. During the consultation your counselor will make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of the patient. Other professionals are also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you do not object, your counselor will not tell you about these consultations unless they feel that it is important to your work together. Your counselor will note all consultations in your Clinical Record (which is called “PHI” in the Notice of Psychologist’s Policies and Practices to Protect the Privacy of Your Health Information).

- You should be aware that your counselor’s practice is within the OC Health & Wellness Center and she/he may consult with other Health Center staff. At times, they may need to share protected information with these individuals for both clinical and administrative purposes, such as scheduling, billing and quality assurance. All of the mental health professionals are bound by the same rules of confidentiality. All staff members have been
given training about protecting your privacy and have agreed not to release any information outside of the practice without the permission of a professional staff member.

There are some situations where your counselor is permitted or required to disclose information without your consent or your authorization:

- If you are involved in a court proceeding and a request is made for information concerning your diagnosis and treatment, such information is protected by the psychologist-patient privilege law. Your counselor cannot provide any information without your (or your personal or legal representative’s) written authorization or a court order. If you are involved in, or contemplating litigation, you should consult with your attorney to determine whether a court would be likely to order your counselor to disclose information.

- If a government agency is requesting the information for health oversight activities your counselor may be required to provide it to them.

- If a patient files a complaint or lawsuit against the counselor, the counselor may disclose relevant information regarding that patient in order to defend himself/herself.

- If a patient files a worker’s compensation claim the counselor may disclose information relevant to that claim to the appropriate parties including the Administrator of the Workers’ Compensation Court.

There are some situations in which your counselor is legally obligated to take action. This occurs when your counselor believes it is necessary to attempt to protect others from harm. In such situations they may have to reveal some information about a patient’s treatment. These situations are unusual at a college counseling center. The following situations represent situations in which your counselor would be legally obligated to take action.

- If your counselor has reason to believe that a child under the age of 18 years is the victim of abuse or neglect the law requires that they report to the appropriate government agency,
usually the Oklahoma Department of Human Services. Once such a report is filed, your counselor may be required to provide additional information.

- If your counselor has reason to believe that a vulnerable adult is suffering from abuse, neglect, or exploitation the law requires that they report to the appropriate government agency, usually the Oklahoma Department of Human Services. Once such a report is filed, your counselor may be required to provide additional information.

- If a patient communicates an explicit threat to kill or inflict serious bodily injury upon a reasonably identifiable victim and he/she has the apparent intent and ability to carry out the threat, or if a patient has a history of violence and your counselor has reason to believe that there is a clear and imminent danger that the patient will attempt to kill or inflict serious bodily injury upon a reasonably identified person. Your counselor may be required to take protective actions. These actions may include notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, and/or seeking hospitalization for the patient.

- If a patient threatens to harm himself/herself, your counselor may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her, or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.

If such a situation arises, your counselor will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action and they will limit disclosure to what is necessary.

While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important that we discuss any questions or concerns that you may have now or in the future. The laws governing confidentiality can be quite complex, and your counselor is not an attorney. In situations where specific advice is required, formal legal advice may be needed.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDS
You should be aware that, pursuant to HIPAA, your counselor keeps Protected Health Information about you in two sets of professional records. One set constitutes your Clinical Record. It includes
information about your reasons for seeking therapy, a description of the ways in which your problem impacts on your life, your diagnosis, the goals that are set for treatment, your progress towards those goals, your medical and social history, your treatment history, any past treatment records that your counselor receives from other providers, reports of any professional consultations, your billing records, and any reports that have been sent to anyone. Except in unusual circumstances that involve danger to yourself and others or where information has been supplied to your counselor by others confidentially, you may examine and/or receive a copy of your Clinical Record if you request it in writing. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. For this reason, the Director of UCC recommends that you initially review them in your counselor’s presence or have them forwarded to another mental health professional so you can discuss the contents. The exceptions to this policy are contained in the attached Notice Form. If your counselor refuses your request for access to your records, you have a right of review, which the UCC Director will discuss with you upon request.

In addition, your counselor may also keep a set of Psychotherapy Notes. These Notes are for his/her own use and are designed to assist him/her in providing you with the best treatment. While the contents of Psychotherapy Notes vary from client to client they can include the contents of session conversations, analysis of those conversations, and how they impact on your therapy. They may also contain particularly sensitive information that you have revealed to your counselor and information from others provided to the counselor confidentially, which are not required to be included in your Clinical Record. These Psychotherapy Notes are kept separate from your Clinical Record. Psychotherapy Notes are not available to you and cannot be sent to anyone else, including insurance companies, without your written/signed Authorization. Insurance companies cannot require your authorization as a condition of coverage nor penalize you in any way for your refusal to provide it.

PATIENT RIGHTS

HIPAA provides you with several new or expanded rights with regard to your Clinical Record and disclosures of protected health information. These rights include requesting that your counselor amend your record, requesting restrictions on what information from your Clinical Record is disclosed to others, requesting an accounting of most disclosures of protected health information that you have neither consented to nor authorized, determining the location to which protected
information disclosures are sent, having any complaints you make about the counseling center’s policies and procedures recorded in your records, and the right to a paper copy of this agreement, the attached Notice form, and counseling center privacy policies and procedures. Your counselor will be happy to discuss any of these rights with you.

MINORS & PARENTS (TYPICALLY FOR STAFF/FACULTY)

Patients under 18 years of age who are not emancipated and their parents should be aware that the law may allow parents to examine their child’s treatment records. Because privacy in psychotherapy is often crucial to successful progress, particularly with teenagers, it is sometimes our policy to request an agreement from parents that they consent to give up their access to their child’s records. If they agree, during treatment, your counselor will provide them only with general information about the progress of the child’s treatment, and his/her attendance at scheduled sessions. Your counselor will also provide parents with a summary of their child’s treatment when it is complete. Any other communication will require the child’s authorization, unless your counselor feels that the child is in danger or is a danger to someone else, in which case, your counselor will notify the parents of his/her concerns. Before giving parents any information, your counselor will discuss the matter with the child, if possible, and do his/her best to handle any objections he/she may have.

YOUR SIGNATURE ON THE ATTACHED COUNSELING & PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES AGREEMENT NOTIFICATION FORM INDICATES THAT YOU HAVE READ THIS AGREEMENT AND AGREE TO ABIDE BY ITS TERMS AND ALSO SERVES AS AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT THAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED THE HIPAA NOTICE FORM DESCRIBED ABOVE.

AFTER YOU HAVE SIGNED THE NOTIFICATION FORM PLEASE RETURN IT TO YOUR COUNSELOR OR OTHER COUNSELING CENTER STAFF. IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS PLEASE DISCUSS THEM WITH YOUR COUNSELOR. THANK YOU.