

INFORMED CONSENT FOR TELETHERAPY
through the Community Counseling Services Center

Defining Teletherapy. Teletherapy is offered to residents of the Washington Metropolitan Area and GWU Students and Alumni by The George Washington University Community Counseling Services Center (CCSC). Teletherapy means conducting counseling using a secure on-line video-conferencing platform. Counseling is conducted by graduate students, that is, Counseling Interns, enrolled in clinical courses offered by the Department of Counseling and Human Development.

However, due to teletherapy's emerging status there are also several areas that can cause concern for clients and counseling interns, including how to manage online-security, confidentiality, legal and licensing concerns, client safety, and effective service provision. These issues are individually addressed below.

Please read this document carefully and write down any questions you may have. We are happy to answer your questions. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between you and the University.

Ethics. Our professional ethical codes (American Counseling Association; National Board of Certified Counselors) have addressed ethical guidelines around providing therapy services online. The CCSC's mission is twofold: to offer you safe, confidential, ethical, effective, and high-quality therapy services; and to prepare counseling students to become professional counselors. Counseling interns have basic knowledge about teletherapy will be supported by their instructors, supervisors and CCSC staff in using teletherapy to you meet your counseling goals.

CCSC's Approach to Counseling. Our services are designed to help you make decisions, enhance self-understanding, manage emotions, or handle challenges related to school, work, personal relationships, or family problems. Your goals, motivation, life experience, coping skills and other strengths are important in counseling. We respect your value system. You make decisions, while counseling interns use techniques and methods used by professional counselors to assist you. Candor is important. Counseling is most effective when you share information freely with your counselor. Counseling interns will not knowingly use deception in any form.

As you begin counseling, the counseling intern, in consultation with a supervisor and instructor, will check to be sure the CCSC is a good setting for you to pursue your counseling goals. If the CCSC does not have the right services, the counseling intern will provide you with information on where you can find more appropriate services.

Counseling interns will begin counseling with a client by understanding the problems, concerns and issues that led you to seek counseling. They will work with you to set counseling goals. Counseling interns will

explain the limitations, risks and benefits of counseling, and the boundaries of counseling relationships. You have the right and responsibility to ask questions and discuss your expectations and progress.

To gauge the effectiveness of counseling, the counseling intern will ask you to complete appropriate psychological assessments. The counseling intern will explain the information gained from these standardized instruments in terms that make sense to you.

Counseling sessions are scheduled on the same day and time each week. If a session is cancelled, the session will be rescheduled for the following week. Counseling sessions last 50 minutes. If you are late in joining a session, the session cannot be extended. If you will be more than 30 minutes late, the session should be rescheduled for the following week.

The CCSC closes for one week each semester and three to five weeks between semesters. Counseling sessions typically do not take place when the CCSC is closed.

Your Safety. Compared to an in-office setting, in teletherapy the counseling intern has less control over the environment. For example, if a client is experiencing extreme distress or is otherwise at risk, it is more difficult for the counseling intern providing teletherapy to access supportive others in close contact to provide immediate assistance (family members, medical professionals, emergency services). As a result, it is very important that the client and counseling intern talk together at the onset of teletherapy, and throughout the process, to determine if teletherapy is an appropriate way to receive services. In addition, clients will need to provide an emergency contact and information on their local resources and give counseling intern permission to access them if the counseling intern believes that calling for emergency services is needed.

Limitations of the CCSC

1. The CCSC is not a 24-hour or emergency clinic. We do not provide unscheduled teletherapy sessions.
2. Counseling can have some unexpected consequences. Reviewing the past can be painful and upsetting. Acquiring new insights and skills can affect relationships and life decisions. While the CCSC, its counseling interns, supervisors and instructors work to ensure that you receive appropriate and effective counseling, the CCSC cannot promise or guarantee favorable results.
3. If you experience symptoms that could endanger your safety and well-being such as suicidal or homicidal urges or plans; highly risky use of alcohol or other drugs of abuse; re-emergence of disordered eating; or other severe psychiatric symptoms, your counseling intern, in consultation with supervisors and clinic staff, will help you find immediate help, which could include hospitalization, and/or longer term mental health care in a more specialized setting.
4. While counseling records can be subpoenaed, counseling interns are not licensed and in court proceedings, the testimony of unlicensed providers is not typically considered relevant. Neither the CCSC nor counseling interns can provide legal support or court-mandated treatment.

Confidentiality and its Limits

1. Strict confidentiality of the contents of counseling sessions, including your disclosures; counseling interns' notes, and the content of your file is maintained by the CCSC and its counseling interns, supervisors and instructors.

2. Counseling documents are stored on a separate, secure server that is not linked to any of the University's information systems. Counseling notes and documents are retained by the CCSC for five years.
3. To coordinate treatment across couple, family, and individual counseling sessions, CCSC records are viewed and discussed by counseling interns, instructors and supervisors as needed.
4. Your information can be released by the CCSC if you give explicit consent in writing by signing a release of information.
 - a. When counseling interns learn that their clients are in a professional relationship with other behavioral health healthcare professionals, they will request release from clients to inform the other professionals and strive to establish positive and collaborative professional relationships in order to benefit the client.
 - b. If a client is currently working with another behavioral healthcare provider, the client should tell his/her/their counseling intern. If a client decides to consult another behavioral healthcare provider later, the client should tell the counseling intern.
5. Information about you may be released *without your written consent* in these circumstances:
 - a. You pose an imminent and serious threat to yourself or another person. If you threaten another person, the CCSC will inform that person.
 - b. Your counseling intern suspects that a child or vulnerable adult is at risk for abuse or neglect
 - c. If you are under the age of 16 and you have been sexually or physically abused, raped, or the victim of another crime
 - d. When information is ordered by a court subpoena
 - e. If you require hospitalization or emergency care.
 - f. If you share information about physical or sexual abuse, your counseling intern must report it the appropriate authorities.

Communication with your Counseling Intern. Counseling interns will need to email their clients so Your Counseling Intern can provide you with a work cell phone number. The CCSC staff can also pass along messages left at (202) 994-8645 or CCSCFoggyBottom@gwu.edu.

Counselor interns do not accept friend or contact requests from current or former clients on any social networking site (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.) because it may compromise the client's confidentiality and blur the boundaries of the therapeutic relationship.

Video Conferencing using Zoom. The Department of Counseling and Human Development has secured licensing for counseling intern's use of a HIPAA compliant version of the online video-conferencing platform Zoom. This is the enhanced version of Zoom and provides safe, confidential, and encrypted therapy in an online format. It is HIPAA-compliant and is used by many healthcare and university systems. You can find information on using Zoom on the CCSC's Website or by sending an email to CCSCFoggyBottom@gwu.edu. You will not have to purchase a plan or provide your name when you join an online meeting. You should experiment with Zoom ahead of your first session.

Conducting Teletherapy Sessions. Engaging in counseling online differs from a traditional office setting. General etiquette and protocol should be followed. Please attend session on time and dress in appropriate attire.

1. Recording of sessions is NOT permitted.
2. A webcam or a smartphone needs to be used during the session.

3. It is important to be in a quiet, private space that is free of distractions (including cell phone or other devices) during the session.
4. Be sure to have ample light around your computer so your counseling intern can see you clearly.
5. It is imperative that no family member or friend is in hearing or visual proximity to you or to your electronic device during the session.
6. It is important to have a secure internet connection rather than public/free Wi-Fi. Check your internet provider and the regulations in your jurisdiction to ultimately determine if you are comfortable using the internet as a method to receive counseling services.
7. In order to be punctual please set up for the appointment at least 5 minutes before it is due to begin. You will be admitted to a virtual waiting room.
8. Our safety plan includes at least one emergency contact and the closest Emergency Department to your location, in the event of a crisis.
9. Your counseling intern, in consultation with a supervisor, may determine that due to certain circumstances, teletherapy is no longer appropriate for you, and that you should resume sessions in-person with a counselor better equipped to meet your needs.
10. Your counseling intern and you will need to determine an alternate way to contact each other in case the internet goes down immediately prior to or during a session. The intern and you can determine together the most comfortable solution. Some suggestions are a one-time telephone session or brief email contact to re-schedule. This is not meant to be an ongoing solution, but a way to complete your session or touch-base.

Your location. You will need to supply the street address of the location where you will be when you participate in teletherapy. This information is important so that teletherapy sessions comply with relevant legal and licensing requirements.

Supervision and Teletherapy. All counseling interns are supervised on a weekly basis. Supervisors are either doctoral level counseling students who are under supervision, or staff members who are appropriately licensed. During clinical courses, counseling interns receive group supervision weekly in a classroom setting from a faculty member of the Department of Counseling and Human Development.

Our accrediting body, the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs, requires that if counseling sessions are not videotaped, supervisors must provide live supervision. Clients may see a black square with the supervisor's name on the screen, and supervisors will mute their microphones. Supervisors typically will not interact with the counseling intern or the client during a counseling session. Supervisors may or may not monitor an entire session. Clients may request that the supervisor is present only via a cellphone.

Like counseling interns, supervisors face sanctions should they break confidentiality unless a client reports abuse or neglect; or is a danger to self or others; or the client signs a Release of Information.

Consultation: Counseling interns receive weekly supervision through the same secure video conferencing platform used for teletherapy. In addition, counseling interns will be able to briefly consult with their supervisors or a CCSC staff member during the session. They will leave their teletherapy setting briefly to consult. Clients should maintain the video conference link during consultations.

Expectations of Clients

Readiness for sessions. The CCSC expects that you will refrain from the use of alcohol or psychoactive drugs prior to your teletherapy session. If you are under the influence of alcohol or other recreational drugs, your counseling session will be halted, and you will be charged the session fee.

Leaving counseling. You have the right to terminate counseling at the CCSC at any time. Attending at least one more session after you make the decision is very helpful to you and to your counseling intern.

Fees. Counseling fees are set during the screening interview according to a sliding scale and range from \$5.00 to \$30.00. Clients pay for the session on the day the session is held using the GSEHD Marketplace. The CCSC does not send bills, but a client may ask for a statement at any time. If a client does not pay for four sessions, the subsequent sessions will be cancelled until the balance is paid. All fees must be paid in full at the end of each semester. If appointments are not cancelled with 24 hours before the session would start, the client will be responsible for paying a late cancellation fee, equal to the cost of one session. In addition, any fees charged to CCSC for release of information will be the responsibility of the client.

Cancellations. Please notify the CCSC or your counseling intern 24 hours in advance of a cancellation. You can reach the CCSC at (202) 994-8645 or CCSCFoggyBottom@gwu.edu. If you cancel an appointment less than 24 hours before the start of the session, you are responsible for paying the regular fee.

Attendance. If you miss three sessions in any four-week period, you will be discharged from the CCSC.

Alternatives to Teletherapy. The CCSC can provide alternatives to teletherapy. Not every service works well for every person, so it is important that you are aware of your options. You may want to use the traditional, in-office setting for therapy. Your counseling intern can help you find a therapist in the community. You could start or rely more upon resources outside the CCSC--psychiatry services for medication management for mental health symptoms. In addition, on-line support groups can help. You can end counseling at this point. Please discuss this option with your counseling intern before you end contact with the CCSC.

Location where you will be during teletherapy sessions:

Full Name		
Street Address		
City	State	ZIP Code
Email Address		

Emergency Contact:

Name	Phone Number	Alternate Phone Number
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Nearest Emergency Department

Name of the Hospital	Phone Number	
Street Address		
City	State	ZIP Code

By signing this document, you indicate that you have read the document, *Supplemental Informed Consent for Teletherapy* and agree to its terms. You are stating that you are aware that your counseling intern may contact the necessary authorities in case of an emergency and may contact your emergency contact. You are also acknowledging that if you believe there is imminent harm to yourself or another person, you will seek care immediately through your own local health care provider or at the nearest hospital emergency department or by calling 911.

Client's Signature (You may sign this form. Typing in your name constitutes an electronic signature)	Date
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This form must be received before your first teletherapy appointment. Please send this form to the CCSC. Options include:

- Complete the form; save it; and send it attached to an email to CCSCFoggyBottom@gwu.edu.
- Take a picture or screen shot of the last page of this form and send it to CCSCFoggyBottom@gwu.edu.
- Print out the form and complete it; scan it and attach it to an email to CCSCFoggyBottom@gwu.edu.