

NORTHLAND

Behavioral Health & Wellness

Welcome to the office of Melissa Oeffner, LCSW. This document contains important information about the professional services and business policies of this office. Please read it carefully. When you sign this informed consent document, it will represent an agreement between us.

Counseling services: Counseling is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the counselor and client, and the particular problems brought forward. There are many different methods that may be used to deal with the problems that you will hope to address. Counseling is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, it calls for a very active effort on your part. In order for the counseling to be most successful, you will have to work on counseling issues both during out sessions and at home.

Counseling can have benefits and risks. Since counseling often involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings of sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. On the other hand, counseling has also been shown to have many benefits. Counseling often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. There are no guarantees of what you will experience.

Your Counselor will likely spend the first 1-3 sessions gathering information and evaluation your needs. Counseling involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should be very careful about the counselor you select. If you do not feel there is a therapeutic match, we would be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.

Appointments: Your counseling appointments will likely be set weekly, every other week, or monthly as deemed necessary. Appointments are usually scheduled to last approximately 45 -50 minutes. Once an appointment hour is scheduled, you will be expected to attend. In accordance with office policy, when 24-hour notice is not given for cancellation, a \$25 fee will be charged. Further, after two appointments are missed with no advance notice of cancellation this office reserves the right to discontinue treatment. We normally provide a reminder call 24 hours in advance of appointments.

Insurance / Self Pay Fees: Your Counselor's hourly fee is _____. In addition to weekly appointments, this amount would also be charged for other professional services needed, though the hourly cost would be broken down if work lasted less than one hour. Other services include report writing, telephone conversations lasting longer than 15 minutes, attendance to meetings with other professionals you have authorized, preparation of treatment summaries for disability cases or other legal issues, and the time spent performing another service you may request. If you become involved in legal proceedings that require my participation, you will be expected to pay for my professional time even if I am called to testify by another party.

Initial: _____

Billing and Payments: You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless agreed upon otherwise. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to when they are requested. For your convenience we accept cash or checks. I do not accept Credit and debit cards as a method of payment. There will be a \$30 fee for all returned checks. For questions related to billing, call 816-420-8419 and speak with Shelly.

If your account has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements for payment have not been agreed upon, I have the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may involve hiring a collection agency or going through small claims court. In most collection situations, the only information I release regarding a client's treatment is his/her name, the nature of services provided, last known address and employer, and the amount due.

Financial Status Changes: In order for us to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate what resources you have available to pay for your treatment from time to time. If your financial status changes and a health insurance policy is now available to you it will usually provide some coverage for your mental health treatment, it is important to present proper proof of insurance and your activation date so we can update our records. **We will assist you with the billing process; however, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of incurred fees.** It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

You should be aware that most insurance companies require you to authorize this office to provide them a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of the entire record will be requested in lieu of payment. This information will become part of the insurance company's claim to keep such information confidential, I have no control over what they do with it once it is in their hands.

If you provided this office with insurance information we attempted to find out if I am in network with them and to pre-authorize your services.

Messages / Emergency Services: Your Counselor is often not immediately available by telephone. The receptionist or answering service will answer the phone between the hours of 8 a.m. and 5 p.m. They can assist you with scheduling needs and or take detailed messages. After 5 p.m. a voice mail system will allow you to leave a message or, in the case of an emergency, follow prompts to contact your Counselor directly. When messages are left, we make every effort to return calls on the same day they were made (except on weekends and holidays). Please make it clear whether your call is an emergency. If you are difficult to reach, please inform us of some times when you will be available. Go to the nearest Emergency Room if you are unable to reach someone in case of an emergency.

Confidentiality: In general, the privacy of all communications between a client and a counselor is protected by law, and information can only be released with your written permission. But, there are a few exceptions.

Initial: _____

In most legal proceedings, you have the right to prevent a counselor from providing any information about your treatment. In some proceedings involving child custody and those in which your emotional condition is an important issue, a judge may order testimony if he/ she determines that the issues demand it.

There are some situations in which your counselor is legally obligated to take action to protect others from harm even if the information about the client's treatment must be revealed. For example, if there is a reason to believe a child, elder, or disabled person is being abused, a report must be filed with the appropriate state agency.

If there is reason to believe a client is threatening serious bodily harm to another, counselors are required to take protection actions. These actions may include notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, or seeking hospitalization for the client. If the client threatened to harm himself/herself, there also may be obligation to seek hospitalization for him/her or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.

Your Counselor might occasionally find it helpful to consult with other professionals about a case. During a consultation, every effort to avoid revealing the identity of the client will be made. The consultant is also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you do not object, we will not tell you about these consultations unless it is felt important to your treatment.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and agree to abide by its terms during our professional relationship.

Client Signature

Counselor Signature

Date

Initial: _____