



Avers & Biddle Counseling Associates LLC  
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## **Outpatient Services Agreement**

Welcome to our practice, we are very excited to be working with you! If this is your first time in counseling or even if you have been through counseling before, there are some things you should know about the counseling relationship and our practice. We have provided this form to keep you informed on what to expect when working with us.

### **General Information**

- Our office hours are by appointment and vary for each therapist. If you need to reach your therapist outside of a scheduled session, we do our best to answer phone calls or emails within 1-2 business days unless it is a weekend or holiday.
- In the event of an emergency situation, you are always encouraged to call 911 or visit the emergency room at the closest hospital. In the event of a crisis situation, please call Lancaster Crisis Intervention at 717-394-2631. In the event that an emergency situation or crisis situation occurs during a session, your therapist will take the proper steps to assure that you are referred to the appropriate level of care.
- We strongly believe you should feel comfortable with the therapist you choose and optimistic about your treatment. Therapy is more likely to be a benefit to you when you feel this way. We view therapy as a partnership between us where we are working together. Psychotherapy requires your active involvement in treatment. From time to time, we will look at our progress and goals together. If we think we need to, we can then change your treatment plan and its goals. If you find you don't connect with your therapist after a few sessions, please let us know and we can help you find a better fit.
- The length of time spent in therapy depends on several factors such as your particular mental illness or situation, severity of the symptoms you are having, and how long you've had symptoms or have been dealing with your situation. There are times when it may take only several sessions to help you cope with a short-term situation. In other cases, treatment may last a year or longer if you have a long-term mental illness or other long-term concerns.
- Counseling sessions generally last 45 minutes to an hour. Please call at least 24 hours ahead of time if you are unable to keep an appointment or you may be charged a \$50.00 fee.

### **The Benefits and Risks of Therapy**

There are some risks as well as many benefits when it comes to participating in therapy. There may be a chance that a client's problems temporarily worsen at the beginning of treatment. Sometimes throughout the course of treatment clients will have uncomfortable levels of sadness, anxiety, anger, guilt, loneliness, or other undesired feelings. Clients may recall unpleasant memories that could increase these feelings. Most of these risks are to be expected when someone is making important changes in their life. Finally, even with our best efforts, there is a possibility that therapy may not work out well for you.

However, there are also many benefits to participating in therapy that are backed by research studies. Individuals may no longer feel afraid, angry, or anxious and depression may decrease. Client's may improve their coping skills and gain the ability to maintain their mental health stability. Individuals ability to communicate effectively may improve, giving them more satisfaction out of their relationships. People also often find that they have a clearer sense of direction about what they want in their life.

### **About Confidentiality**

Generally, the privacy of all communications between us is protected by law, and your therapist can only release information about your work to others with your written permission. However, there are a few exceptions listed below. These circumstances do not occur often and if one of them does happen, your therapist will make an effort to discuss it with you before taking any action.

- **Child Abuse:** If your therapist believes a child is being sexually, physically, or emotionally abused, they are required by law to report this to the Pennsylvania Department of Public Welfare.
- **Judicial or Administrative Proceedings:** If you are involved in a court proceeding and a request is made about the professional services your therapist provided or a records request is made, this information is privileged under state law, and we will not release the information without your written consent, or a court order. Confidentiality does not apply when you are being evaluated for a third party or where the evaluation is court ordered. Your therapist will tell you in advance if this is the case.
- **Worker's Compensation:** If you file a worker's compensation claim, your therapist is required to file periodic progress reports with your employer.
- **Serious Threat to Health or Safety:** If you express a serious threat, or intent to kill or seriously injure an identified or readily identifiable person or group of people, and your therapist concludes that you are likely to carry out the threat, we are required to take reasonable measures to prevent harm. Reasonable measures may include directly advising the potential victim of the threat or notifying authorities. Confidentiality would also not be protected if you make a serious threat to harm yourself.

There are two circumstances in which your therapist might talk about part of your case with another therapist. First, when your therapist is on vacation they will sometimes have a fellow therapist cover for them. This person will be available to you in case of an emergency and therefore needs to know about you. In a situation like this, your therapist would have you sign a release of information form so that they can share information. Second, we sometimes consult with other therapists about our clients to receive feedback and advice on how to help you. These persons are also required to keep your information private. Your name will **never** be given to them and they will be told only as much as they need to know to understand your situation.

Except for situations like those described above, your therapist will always maintain your privacy. If your records need to be seen by another professional, or anyone else, your therapist will discuss it with you and you will need to sign a release of information form. It is our office policy to destroy clients' records 10 years after the end of our therapy. Until then, we will keep your case records in a safe and secure place.

### **Statement of Principles and Complaint Procedures**

The therapists at our practice fully abide by the ethical codes that correlate to their specific license and the state of Pennsylvania. This includes the National Association Of Social Workers (NASW), the American Counseling Association (ACA) code of ethics, and the Pennsylvania State Board of Social Workers, Marriage and Family Therapists and Professional Counselors board laws and regulation. If you would like to read either of these code of ethics or the state board laws and regulations you can find them at:

<https://www.socialworkers.org/About/Ethics/Code-of-Ethics/Code-of-Ethics-English>

[https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/ethics/2014-code-of-ethics.pdf?sfvrsn=2d58522c\\_4](https://www.counseling.org/docs/default-source/ethics/2014-code-of-ethics.pdf?sfvrsn=2d58522c_4)

<https://www.pacodeandbulletin.gov/Display/pacode?file=/secure/pacode/data/049/chapter47/chap47toc.html&d=red uce>

Just as in any relationship, problems can sometimes arise as you are working with your therapist. If you are not satisfied with what is happening in therapy, please talk to your therapist about your concerns. It will be more difficult to make progress if your concerns are not worked out. We will make every effort to hear any feedback or complaints you have and to seek solutions to them. If you ever feel that you have been treated unfairly or that your therapist has broken a professional rule, please contact Mindy Biddle MA LPC or Hannah Avers LCSW. You can also contact the state or local board association and speak to the chairperson of the ethics committee. They can help clarify your concerns or tell you how to file a complaint.

In our practice, we do not discriminate against clients because of age, sex, marital/family status, race, religious beliefs, ethnic origin, veteran status, physical disability, health status, sexual orientation, or criminal record unrelated to present dangerousness. We will always take steps to advance and support the values of equal opportunity and racial/ethnic/cultural diversity. If you believe you have been discriminated against, please bring this matter to our attention immediately.

### **Minors**

In the state of Pennsylvania, minors who are 14 to 17 years old have the right to independently consent to and receive mental health treatment without parental consent. The general rule is that the person who initiates treatment (the minor or their parent/guardian) has the right to control information. When minors of this age initiate their therapy, information about their treatment cannot be disclosed to anyone, including their parents, without the adolescent's agreement. Although confidentiality in psychotherapy is very important, especially with teenagers, in most cases parental involvement is also essential. Therefore, we typically ask that adolescents authorize us to provide general information to their parents about their treatment.

If the parents of 14 to 17 year olds initiate therapy, then they have the right to ask about their adolescent's treatment. We will provide parents with only general information about their teenager's treatment, unless we feel that there is a high risk that the adolescent will seriously harm themselves or someone else. Before giving parents information, we always discuss this with the adolescent and do our best to handle any objections they may have to what we plan to disclose. Parents do have the right to access treatment information for minors under the age of 14. As with minors aged 14 and older, we usually ask parents to allow us to give them general information about their child's therapy so that the child feels like they can confide in us. However, younger children typically require more parental involvement than older children. In all cases, your therapist will disclose any concerns that they might have if they feel that the child might harm themselves or someone else. For more information on consenting to mental health treatment for minors, you can visit:

<https://www.dhs.pa.gov/Services/Mental-Health-In-PA/Pages/Act-147-of-2004.aspx>

**Your signature below indicates that you have read this form and agree to abide by its terms while you are receiving services at this office.**

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Signature Date:** \_\_\_\_\_