



## CLIENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### Right to Know the Risks and Benefits of Online Counseling

The **benefits** include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- **Convenience:** Seek counseling from your home and on your schedule
- **Choice:** Choose the counselor you feel is best matched to your needs
- **Easy access:** No need to travel to another location—saves you time and money, eliminates the need to wait in a waiting room with others and the potential stigma of being seen at the counselor's office/clinic. If you are homebound or have limited mobility, online counseling is an excellent option for you.
- **Anonymity:** No one but the counselor needs to know that you are seeking services, and because your information is not entered into an insurance company data base, you do not have to worry that your private information is being used by another organization for research or other purposes you did not intend
- **Flexibility:** You can choose as few or as many sessions as you need, with no third party authorization required
- **Affordability:** Even though it is currently not covered by insurance, the range of options allows you to choose an affordable service matched to your budget, and often costs the same or less as insurance company co-payments, with no limit on the number of sessions you can receive.

The **risks** include (but are not necessarily limited to):

- **Misunderstanding:** Because the non-verbal cues, such as facial expressions and body language, are missing from the online counseling interaction, there is an increase potential for misunderstandings between the counselor and client.
- **Risk of exacerbating a problem or making negative feelings worse:** As with all counseling services, there is the potential that receiving treatment may temporarily make you feel worse, especially in the beginning of treatment. Talking about and working on problems brings them to the forefront of our lives. We know that problem-solving and self-improvement can be hard work, and counseling is no exception. Sometimes things get worse before they get better.
- **Lack of insurance coverage:** Insurance does not currently cover the cost of online counseling services, so the only option is private payment.
- **Not appropriate for every need:** Online counseling may not be an appropriate option for your mental health needs. Some problems are not well-suited to the online format. These include psychotic illnesses (ones that include thought disorders, hallucinations, delusions, etc.) and suicidal ideation (suicidal thoughts, plans, behaviors, intentions). The counselor will tell you if your needs are appropriate for online services. But if you are suicidal, get help immediately. Call 911 or 1-800-SUICIDE or ask a trusted family member living with you for help now.
- **Possible breach of privacy:** Although the counselor is required to do everything possible to protect your confidentiality and the privacy of your information, there are risks associated with electronic communications. Freethought Counseling's website is encrypted and secure. However, as with any electronic communication, it is possible that someone could hack into your computer or your online live chat session. If you share a computer with another person, that person may have access to read your e-mails and other files. It is also possible your computer could become infected with a virus. If you plan to use online counseling services, you should keep your

antivirus, antispyware and adware, and Internet security software up-to-date. Protect your files with a password, do not let anyone else access your e-mail or files, and if you share a computer with another person or think someone may be able to access your computer, provide the counselor with a codeword that can be used to identify you. Do not share the codeword with anyone.

### **Right to request how the counselor contacts you**

We will contact you using the telephone number, e-mail address, and/or chat screen name you provide. You decide where and when

### **Right to verify the credentials of the counselor**

You have a right to verify that your counselor is licensed to practiced and possesses the credentials described. Links to the credentialing organizations are found on the home page of [www.freethoughtcounseling.com](http://www.freethoughtcounseling.com). You may also contact the Wisconsin Department of Regulation and Licensing or the National Board for Certified Counselors directly and request this information via telephone.

### **Right to understand your treatment options**

Before you decide to purchase or receive a free trial of telephone or e-mail counseling services, you have the right to understand that other options are available to you. Face-to-face counseling provides one-on-one or group counseling in an office or clinic setting with a counselor. If you are unsure how to locate and choose a counselor, ask a trusted health professional, your insurance company, or call the American Counseling Association, the American Psychological Association, the National Board for Certified Counselors, or National Association for Social Workers. Crisis hotlines may also be available in your area and there are a number of hotlines available nationally, including two suicide hotline numbers in the United States: 1-800-SUICIDE or 1-800-273-TALK. If you are suicidal or are experiencing a mental health emergency, it is imperative that you seek help immediately. Call a suicide hotline or call 911 and ask for help.

### **Right to release your medical records**

You may consent in writing to release your records to others. You have the right to revoke this authorization, in writing, at any time. However, a revocation is not valid to the extent that we acted in reliance on such authorization.

### **Right to inspect and copy your medical and billing records**

You have the right to inspect and obtain a copy of your information contained in our medical records. To request access to your billing or health information, go to [www.freethoughtcounseling.com](http://www.freethoughtcounseling.com), print out the Request to Obtain Records, complete the form, and mail it to the address above, or scan the completed form and e-mail it to [counselor@freethoughtcounseling.com](mailto:counselor@freethoughtcounseling.com). If you ask for a copy of any information, we may charge a reasonable fee for the costs of copying, mailing and supplies.

### **Right to add information or amend your medical records**

If you feel that information contained in your medical record is incorrect or incomplete, you may ask us to add information to amend the record. We will make a decision on your request with 60 days, or some cases within 90 days. Under certain circumstance, we may deny your request to add or amend information. If we deny your request, you have a right to file a statement that you disagree. Your statement and our response will be added to your record. Submit your request in writing, signed and dated, and mail to Freethought Counseling at the address above. You must provide an explanation concerning the reason for your request.

### **Right to complain**

If you believe your privacy rights have been violated, please contact us personally, and discuss your concerns. If you are not satisfied with the outcome, you have the right to file a complaint. The Layperson's Guide to Counselor Ethics, which you can read on this web site or on [www.counseling.org](http://www.counseling.org), contains instructions for filing a complaint with the American Counseling Association. You may also file a written complaint with the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. An individual will not be retaliated against for filing such a complaint.

**Right to receive changes in policy**

You have the right to receive any future policy changes secondary to changes in state and federal laws. Policy updates will be posted on [www.freethoughtcounseling.com](http://www.freethoughtcounseling.com). If any policies are changed while you are receiving counseling services, you will be notified by the counselor.

**Right to a referral to another provider if the counselor becomes incapacitated**

In the event that your counselor dies or becomes incapacitated and can no longer provide services, you have the right to receive a referral to another provider, and to receive your medical records so that you may give them to another provider. The designated agent responsible for providing you with a referral and ensuring that you receive your records is Andrew J. Guzikowski, JD. You will be contacted by Attorney Guzikowski in the event that your counselor becomes incapacitated and can no longer provide services.

**Responsibility to protect your privacy and the privacy of the counselor**

You have the responsibility to ensure that you are doing everything possible to protect the privacy of your information, including following the suggestions given above under the heading “Possible breach of privacy” in the bullet list containing the risks of online counseling. You also have the responsibility to protect the confidentiality of the counselor by not using session material outside of the scope of your own personal treatment purposes, and not distributing, sharing, forwarding or reprinting any session material. If the counselor gives you a cell phone number as a contact option, do not share this cell phone number with anyone else.

**Responsibility to pay for the services you receive**

If you order and receive counseling services, you have the responsibility to pay accordingly.

**Responsibility to be available for sessions**

If you schedule a particular session time with the counselor, you are expected to be available at that time or let the counselor know at least 4 hours in advance of canceling the scheduled session.

**Responsibility to read the policies and terms of use prior to purchasing services**

It is your responsibility to make sure you have read and understood what you are agreeing to when you submit your electronic signature and register to purchase counseling services. If you have any questions or if anything is unclear, please ask and we will be happy to answer your questions as quickly as possible.

**Responsibility to let the counselor know if you have a conflict or complaint**

Misunderstandings and conflicts between the counselor and the client happen, just as they happen in any relationship. Working through these misunderstandings or conflicts can be therapeutic and can strengthen the working relationship. If you have a complaint about the services you are receiving, it is your responsibility to talk with the counselor about it. Please also refer to the above section on your Right to Complain.