

Stacie Crochet, LICSW, BCD
Idaho, Oregon, Texas & Washington
info@staciecrochet.com/www.staciecrochet.com
(512) 921-5925

Informed Consent for Online Counseling

The purpose of this document is to inform you, the client, about many aspects of online counseling services: the process, the counseling, the potential risks and benefits of services, safeguards against those risks, and alternatives to online services. Please read this entire document and sign.

A. Process

1) Possible misunderstandings

The client should be aware that misunderstandings are possible with telephone, text-based modalities such as email, and real-time internet chat, because non-verbal cues are relatively lacking. Even with video chat software, misunderstandings may occur due to connection problems causing image delays or less than optimal image quality. Counselors are observers of human behavior and gather much information from body language, vocal inflection, eye contact, and other non-verbal cues. If you have never engaged in online counseling before, please have patience with the process and clarify information if you think your counselor has not understood you well. Also, please be patient if your counselor asks for periodic clarification.

2) Turnaround time

Using asynchronous (not in "real time") communication such as email or instant messaging entails a "lag" of response. The counselor will make every effort to respond to email requests within a 24-hour period during office hours Monday through Thursday. If the client is in a state of crisis or emergency, the counselor recommends the client contact a crisis line or an agency local to the client.

3) Privacy of the counselor

Although the internet provides the appearance of anonymity and privacy in counseling, privacy is more of an issue online than in person. Stacie Crochet, LCSW has chosen to use Vsee as the software provider for web conferencing, and chat communications between the counselor and clients. The client is responsible for securing his or her own computer hardware and internet access points.

The counselor has a right to her privacy and may wish to restrict the use of any copies or recordings the client makes of their communications. Clients must seek the written permission of the counselor before recording any portion of the session and/or posting

any portion of said session on internet websites such as, but not limited to, Facebook or YouTube.

B. Potential benefits

The potential benefits of receiving mental health services online include both the circumstances in which the counselor considers online mental health services appropriate and the possible advantages of providing those services online. For example, the potential benefits of video chat include the convenience for clients to potentially receive counseling from anywhere once an internet signal and necessary hardware is secured. Text-based chat has many of the same advantages of convenience, feeling reduced scrutiny from the counselor, having time to compose a response, and being able to refer back to the chat log for reference. The benefits of using asynchronous email messages may include (1) being able to send Stacie Crochet, LCSW and receive message at any time of day or night; (2) never having to leave messages or voicemails; (3) being able to take as long as one likes to compose a message, and having the opportunity to reflect upon it; (4) automatically having a record of communication to refer to later; and (5) feeling less inhibited than in person.

C. Potential risks

There are various risks related to electronic provision of counseling services related to the technology used, the distance between counselor and client, and issues related to timeliness. For example, the potential risks of email based counseling may include (1) messages not being received and (2) confidentiality being breached through unencrypted email, lack of password protection or leaving information on a public access computer in a library or internet café. Messages could fail to be received if they are sent to the wrong address (which might also breach confidentiality) or if they just are not noticed by the counselor. Confidentiality could be breached in transit by hackers or Internet service providers or at either end by others with access to the client's account or computer. People accessing the internet from public locations such as a library, computer lab, or café should consider the visibility of their screen to people around them. Position yourself to avoid others' ability to read your screen. Using cell phones can also be risky in that signals are scrambled but rarely encrypted.

D. Safeguards

Your counselor has selected an account with Vsee video communications to allow for the highest possible security and confidentiality of the content of your sessions. Vsee can be used by following a personalized link and used without downloading any new software. Your personal information is encrypted and stored on a secure server in compliance with HIPAA regulations. The client is responsible for creating and using additional safeguards when the computer used to access services may be accessed by others, such as creating passwords to use the computer, keeping their email and chat IDs and passwords secret, and maintaining security of their wireless internet access points. Please discuss any additional concerns with your counselor early in your first session so as to develop strategies to limit risk.

E. Alternatives

Online counseling may not be appropriate for many types of clients including those who have numerous concerns over the risks of internet counseling, clients with active suicidal or homicidal thoughts, and clients who are experiencing active manic/psychotic symptoms. In-person sessions would be recommended in these cases.

F. Proxies The counselor requires this consent form to be signed by the legal guardian of any client seeking services who is under the age of 18. The name and contact information of the legal guardian will be kept as part of the client's record.

G. Confidentiality of the client Maintaining client confidentiality is extremely important to the counselor and the counselor will take ordinary care and consideration to prevent unnecessary disclosure. Information about the client will only be released with his or her express and written permission with the exceptions of the following cases:

1) If the counselor believes that someone is seriously considering and likely to attempt suicide; 2) if the counselor believes that someone intends to assault another person; 3) if the counselor believes someone is engaging or intends to engage in behavior which will expose another person to a potentially life-threatening communicable disease; 4) if a counselor suspects abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a minor or of an incapacitated adult; 5) if a counselor believes that someone's mental condition leaves the person gravely disabled.

H. Records The counselor will maintain records of online counseling and/or consultation services. These records can include reference notes, copies of transcripts of chat and internet communication and session summaries. These records are confidential and will be maintained as required by applicable legal and ethical standards according to the National Association of Social Workers and the Washington, Texas, Idaho and Oregon State Department of Health Licensing Board. The client will be asked in advance for permission before any audio or video recording would occur on the counselor's end.

I. Procedures The counselor might not immediately receive an online communication or might experience a local backup affecting internet connectivity. If the client is in a state of crisis or emergency, the counselor recommends contacting a crisis line or an agency local to the client.

J. Payments Payments are preferred to be made by Paypal, Venmo, IvyPay or credit card.

K. Disconnection of Services If there is ever a disruption of services on the internet that cannot be re-established within five minutes, the client will receive a phone call from their therapist to problem-solve.

Client Signature

Date

Parent Signature for client under 18

Date

