

FAMILY COUNSELING ASSOCIATES OF ANDOVER

Distance Counseling Client Informed Consent Form

IMPORTANT INFORMATION REGARDING DISTANCE COUNSELING:

Distance Counseling occurs through video conferencing technology, secure instant messaging, or by phone. Research studies have shown that Distance Counseling is effective, convenient and affordable. Distance Counseling is useful if you would like to see a mental health counselor that is not located in your geographic area.

1. RISKS AND BENEFITS

Like all forms of counseling, Distance Counseling possesses both benefits and some risks. Risks may include—but are not limited to—experiencing feelings such as stress, sadness, guilt, and frustration. In addition, clients may not agree with a mental health counselor’s assessment, diagnosis, case formulation, or treatment.

Benefits of counseling may include improved mood, the resolution of personal problems, improved social interactions, and improved psychological well-being.

Benefits of Distance Counseling may be comparable to those in traditional face-to-face counseling relationship—the building of a counselor-client therapeutic alliance designed to assist a client in his/her personal growth and life issues. However, with use of telephone, video chat, email, or instant messaging, a mental health counselor may be limited in that he/she is unable to take into account the visual or non-verbal cues of a client. Video conferencing is the preferred method of Distance Counseling, but it too might have some limitations associated with the clinician and client not being able to as effectively communicate feelings and emotions. You should weigh the benefits against the limitations of services before consenting to the distance counseling process.

2. CONFIDENTIALITY AND OBLIGATION TO DISCLOSE

Limits of confidentiality differ from state to state; however, the mental health counselors will abide by the laws of their practicing states in regards to reporting any necessary information. This may include the circumstance of a client, deemed to be a serious threat to him/herself or others, being reported to legal authorities or local social services.

It is also law in many states that any disclosure of homicidal threats, child abuse, abuse of a handicapped person, or abuse of an elderly person must be reported immediately to appropriate authorities.

Because of the use of technology in counseling, counselors will utilize a video-conferencing provider that offers protection by a digital certificate and secure socket layer (SSL) encryption. As a means to maintain clients’ electronic counseling records and accounts, your mental health counselor and Family Counseling Associates of Andover will have authorized access to user files regarding selective personally identifiable health information. Family Counseling Associates of Andover will strive to abide by the laws and regulations governing the HIPAA as outlined in our Privacy Policy.

Distance Counselors agree to keep all user information in confidence to the greatest extent of the law, including payment information, records, and contact information. Clients should be aware that many email services are not sent using secure transmissions; however, the likelihood of an email exchange being breached is unlikely as a third-party would need to specifically target the client’s transmissions.

3. PERSONAL MENTAL HEALTH DISCLOSURE

Anyone considering Distance Counseling with a clinician on the website of Family Counseling Associates of Andover must meet/agree to the following conditions:

a) I am not experiencing active suicidal or homicidal ideation.

b) I have no significant history of chronic mental illness and psychiatric hospitalizations.

(If you have a significant mental health history you should see a clinician in your own geographic area, as distance counseling is not recommended for you.)

(c) I am willing to provide the mental health counselor with the name of a local resource (mental health professional, doctor, minister, or responsible family member/friend) who lives in my geographic area, that would be available in case of an emergency and I authorize release of my personal health information to named individual(s).

NOTE: If you are suicidal, this is not the proper service for you. Seek immediate help by calling 911 and work with a mental health professional in your geographic area.

4. PAYMENT AND APPOINTMENT POLICY

Payment for counseling sessions is expected at the time services are rendered. Additional counseling sessions appointments cannot be made and held until all outstanding prior balances are paid in full.

Additionally, mental health counselors listed on the website of Family Counseling Associates of Andover require a 24 hour notice of cancellation in order for you to not incur a charge for the booked session. Should you miss your scheduled session, without prior cancellation, your counselor reserves the right to charge you a late cancellation fee. It is your responsibility to notify your counselor of any cancellation or change in appointment date prior to the 24 hour cancellation policy.

5. LIABILITY AND WARRANTIES

You agree to enter the counseling session with a mental health counselor listed on the Website at your own risk and under the terms and legal laws governing your state's licensing of such practice of professional mental health counseling. The counselor with whom you work with will meet professional licensing standards for MA but may not actually reside in your home state.