

## INFORMED CONSENT FOR TELEPSYCHOLOGY

This Informed Consent for Telepsychology contains important information on the provision of psychotherapy and/or assessment using the phone or the Internet by the Texas A&M University Counseling and Assessment Clinic (CAC). Please read this carefully, and let us know if you have any questions. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between you and the CAC.

### **Benefits and Risks of Telepsychology**

Telepsychology refers to providing psychological services remotely using telecommunications technologies, such as video conferencing or telephone. One of the benefits of telepsychology is that the client and clinician can engage in services without being in the same physical location. This can be helpful in ensuring continuity of care if the client or clinician moves to a different location, takes an extended vacation, or is otherwise unable to continue to meet in person. It is also more convenient and takes less time. Telepsychology, however, requires technical competence on both your part and that of your counselor/evaluator to be helpful. Although there are benefits of telepsychology, there are some differences between in-person psychotherapy/assessment and telepsychology, as well as some risks. For example:

- Risks to confidentiality. Because telepsychology sessions take place outside of the CAC, there is potential for other people to overhear sessions if you/your child are not in a private place during the session. We will take reasonable steps to ensure your privacy. But it is important for you to make sure you find a private place for the session where you/your child will not be interrupted. It is also important for you to protect the privacy of our session on your cell phone or other device. You/your child should participate in the session only while in a room or area where other people are not present and cannot overhear the conversation.
- Issues related to technology. There are many ways that technology issues might impact telepsychology. For example, technology may stop working during a session, other people might be able to get access to our private conversation, or stored data could be accessed by unauthorized people or companies.
- Crisis management and intervention. Usually, we will not engage in telepsychology with clients who are currently in a crisis situation requiring high levels of support and intervention. Before engaging in telepsychology, we will develop an emergency response plan to address potential crisis situations that may arise during the course of our telepsychology work.
- Efficacy. Most research shows that telepsychology is about as effective as in-person psychotherapy. However, some clinicians believe that something is lost by not being in the same room. For example, there is debate about a clinician's ability to fully understand non-verbal information when working remotely.

### **Electronic Communications**

We will decide together which kind of telepsychology service to use. You may have to have certain computer or cell phone systems to use telepsychology services. You are solely responsible for any cost to you to obtain any necessary equipment, accessories, or software to take part in telepsychology.

For communication between sessions, we only use email communication and text messaging with your permission and only for administrative purposes unless we have made another agreement. This means that email exchanges and text messages with our office should be limited to administrative matters. This includes things like setting and changing appointments, billing matters, and other related issues. You should be aware that we cannot guarantee the confidentiality of any information communicated by email or text. Therefore, we will not discuss any clinical information by email or text and prefer that you do not either. Also, we do not regularly check our email or texts, nor do we respond immediately, so these methods **should not** be used if there is an emergency.

Treatment is most effective when clinical discussions occur at your regularly scheduled sessions. But if an urgent issue arises, you should feel free to attempt to reach us by phone. Your counselor/evaluator will try to return your call within 24 hours except on weekends and holidays. If you are unable to reach the CAC and feel that you cannot wait for us to return your call, contact your family physician or the nearest emergency room and ask for the psychologist or psychiatrist on call.

### **Confidentiality**

We have a legal and ethical responsibility to make best efforts to protect all communications that are a part of our telepsychology. However, the nature of electronic communications technologies is such that we cannot guarantee that our communications will be kept confidential or that other people may not gain access to our communications. We will try to use updated encryption methods, firewalls, and back-up systems to help keep your information private, but there is a risk that our electronic communications may be compromised, unsecured, or accessed by others. You should also take reasonable steps to ensure the security of our communications (for example, only using secure networks for telepsychology sessions and having passwords to protect the device you use for telepsychology).

You will be informed at the start of a telepsychology session who is in the room or on the line with your counselor/evaluator. The laws that protect the confidentiality of your health information are outlined in the CAC Client Information and Notice of Privacy Practices and still apply in telepsychology. Please let us know if you have any questions about the confidentiality of your health information.

### **Appropriateness of Telepsychology**

You have the right to withhold or withdraw your consent to the use of telepsychology at any time without affecting your receipt of future care or treatment. From time to time, we may schedule in-person sessions to “check-in” with you. Your counselor/evaluator will let you know if they decide that telepsychology is no longer the most appropriate form of treatment for you/your child. We will discuss options of engaging in in-person counseling or referrals to another professional in your location who can provide appropriate services.

CAC counselors/evaluators are licensed in the state of Texas and will need to confirm that you are located in Texas prior to the start of each telepsychology session. If you are not physically located in Texas, we will discuss options of engaging in in-person counseling or referrals to another professional in your location who can provide appropriate services.

**Emergencies and Technology**

Assessing and evaluating threats and other emergencies can be more difficult when conducting telepsychology than in traditional in-person therapy or assessment. To address some of these difficulties, we will create an emergency plan before engaging in telepsychology services. Your counselor/evaluator will ask you to identify an emergency contact person who is near your location and who they will contact in the event of a crisis or emergency to assist in addressing the situation. Signing this form indicates that you authorize us to contact your emergency contact person as needed during such a crisis or emergency.

Delays in medical evaluation or treatment could result from technical deficiencies or failures of the telecommunications technology used to provide the telepsychology services. If the session is interrupted for any reason and you/your child is having an emergency, do not call your counselor/evaluator back; instead, call 911, MHMR Hotline 979-361-9815 (Ext. 185), College Station Medical Center 979-764-5100, or St. Joseph Hospital 979-776-3777, or go to your nearest emergency room. Call the CAC back after you have called or obtained emergency services.

If the session is interrupted and you are not having an emergency, disconnect from the session and your counselor/evaluator will wait two (2) minutes and then re-contact you via the telepsychology platform on which we agreed to conduct the session. If you do not receive a call back within two (2) minutes, then call your counselor/evaluator on the phone number they provided you (979-595-1770).

**Fees**

The same fee rates will apply for telepsychology as apply for in-person services. Fees will be paid electronically through credit/debit card or ACH. Please inform us if this becomes a hardship for you.

**Records**

The telepsychology sessions will be recorded as described in the CAC Client Information and Notice of Privacy Practices for training purposes. Your counselor/evaluator will maintain a record of your session in the same way they maintain records of in-person sessions in accordance with CAC policies.

**Informed Consent**

This agreement is intended as a supplement to the CAC Consent Form that we agreed to at the outset of our clinical work together and does not amend any of the terms of that agreement.

By signing below, I acknowledge that I have read and understand this Informed Consent for Telepsychology. I have had an opportunity to ask questions about this form, and all of my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I hereby give my consent for the use of telepsychology in my care.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Client

\_\_\_\_\_  
Client Date of Birth

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Client (or Parent/Guardian)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date