

# Counseling and Mental Health Center

## University of Houston-Clear Lake

### INFORMED CONSENT

We would like to welcome you to the Counseling and Mental Health Center. We hope that we can help you find the services that you need. We welcome your feedback on your experience in our office and with our services. Please read this document in its entirety, making certain you understand it, asking any questions you may have to either our front desk staff or your initial consultation therapist, and keep a copy of it for your personal records. After reading it, please initial each blank then sign at the bottom.

#### **Confidentiality**

The Counseling and Mental Health Center recognizes that confidentiality is essential to effective therapy. For therapy to work best, you must feel safe sharing personal information with your therapist and know that your privacy will be protected.

Under most circumstances, all information about you obtained in the therapy process (including your identity as a client) is confidential and will be released to parties outside the Counseling and Mental Health Center only with your express written consent.

#### **Limits of Confidentiality**

Because there are certain circumstances in which confidentiality is limited or can be breached, it is important that you carefully read the **Notice of Privacy and Confidentiality Practices**, since it provides detailed information about your right to confidentiality and its limits.

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#### **Eligibility**

Only currently enrolled UHCL students are eligible for Counseling Services at the Counseling and Mental Health Center. During the summer, students who are enrolled for any part of the summer are eligible for services throughout the summer. Continuing students who were enrolled in good standing throughout the spring semester and are already enrolled for the following fall are eligible for limited services during the summer months as appropriate. Couples are eligible for couples therapy if one member is a currently enrolled UHCL student.

#### **Services Offered**

The primary purpose of UHCL Counseling and Mental Health Center is to help students with problems that are interfering with their ability to do their best. In order to use resources most effectively and address student need, the Counseling and Mental Health Center creates a customized treatment plan that fits the unique and specific needs of each client. This model supports client autonomy and connects clients to a range of mental health resources and academic services. The following is a list of possible services that may be included in your individualized Care Plan:

- **Self-Directed Services:** These services include Biofeedback, the Mind Spa, WellTrack, Website Self-Help Resources, etc.
- **Group Services:** This includes Group Therapy and Couples Therapy. Some groups are time-limited (for instance, six or eight meetings), while others are ongoing. Therapy group sessions typically last 50-80 minutes and are scheduled weekly. Couples sessions are 45 minutes.
- **One to One Services:** These services include Individual Therapy, Single Appointment Follow Up, Psychiatric Services and Case Management. If it is determined that individual therapy is the best fit for you, you will discuss goals and a plan with your ongoing therapist including how often and how many sessions it may take to achieve your goals. As we operate within a short-term model for services, the duration of counseling generally lasts between five and fifteen sessions. Each session is generally 45 minutes. Please note that the Counseling and Mental Health Center does not schedule ongoing "standing" weekly appointments for individuals or couples. A client's next appointment will be scheduled at the end of each session. The frequency of sessions may at times be affected by the other demands on our resources.
- **Referrals:** We can assist you with referrals to on-campus offices and programs or to off-campus services or programs. If we determine that you need more extensive services than we can provide, we will help you find a facility that is better equipped and staffed to provide such services.

- Crisis Services: Counseling and Mental Health Center staff attempts to be available to students in immediate need during our office hours. If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, having trouble with basic functioning and completing basic tasks, or are facing an acute stressor that threatens the safety on yourself or others, we will get you in for a same day crisis appointment. If you anticipate that you will need around the clock crisis services available to you, please talk with your therapist. Emergency on-call services are available by phone both during and after business hours to assist UHCL students experiencing a mental health or interpersonal violence crisis. Crisis counselors are familiar with UHCL and community resources and will be able to assist students in managing the situation or direct the caller to appropriate resources.

**UHCL Crisis Line**

281.283.2580, press 2 to speak to a crisis counselor

**24 Hour Crisis Services**

988	Suicide Prevention Lifeline
Text HOME to 741741	Crisis Text line
713.970.7070	Harris County MHMRA Crisis Clinic

If you believe that your problem or concern is not likely to benefit from the above services, feel free to discuss this with a therapist, who will be glad to help you determine how the Counseling and Mental Health Center can best help you, including referrals to other resources.

**Getting Started**

Your initial consultation session will last approximately 20 minutes. The paperwork that you will fill out will need to be completed prior to the start of the initial consultation. This paperwork takes approximately 30 minutes to complete. The initial consultation session will help identify the services most likely to help you; such as group therapy, individual therapy, or other services. We may not be the most appropriate service for your problem or concern. Some problems may be outside the scope of the services that we offer. This might be the case if long-term therapy or specialized treatment is required to help with your problem or concern. If at the initial consultation the therapist feels this is the case for you, they will discuss with you options for more appropriate services. This may require referral to other agencies or professionals, or negotiating a goal that may be reached in a limited number of sessions.

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**Cost of Services**

Your payment of UHCL student service fees allows you to take advantage of therapy services free of charge. Groups are offered free of charge to UHCL students for as long as the group continues. Consultation and referral are generally offered in a single session, free of charge to UHCL students. If testing is performed, you will be charged a minimal amount in order to offset the cost of the materials. There is a small fee associated with psychiatric services. There are fees associated with appointments that are missed without notice (see section below on cancellations).

**Payment Types and Failure to Render Payment**

You may pay by check, cash, or credit card. If you choose to use a credit card for payment, please be aware that your name will be associated with a payment to our office and you will receive an email confirmation. You will not be allowed to continue to schedule appointments if you have a balance on your account and you have not made arrangements for payment. In addition, if you have not paid after sixty days we will place a hold on your university record until your account has been paid in full, or other arrangements have been made.

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**Cancellations, No-Shows and Late Arrivals**

Excessive cancellations or failure to provide notice of a cancellation deprives other clients of therapy services and negatively affects the therapy process and your progress. If you are going to be late to an appointment please call and notify the office. It may be necessary to reschedule your appointment.

If you are unable to attend your appointment for any reason, you must call to reschedule before the starting time of your appointment, otherwise it is counted as a no-show. If it is necessary to cancel a session, clients are requested to provide at least 24 hours' notice, if a client does not cancel within that time, the cancellation is considered a late cancellation. Appointments that are rescheduled more than a week in advance are not counted as a cancellation.

In the event of two no-show appointments, you will be contacted via either written letter or formal email to your provided email address on file informing you of your \$25 no show account fee. A copy of this letter will be documented in your client

file.

Three missed appointments (cancellations, late cancellations, or no shows) within an academic year lead to a required consultation appointment with the Associate Director. Clients cannot schedule another appointment until after their meeting with the Associate Director. Beginning with a second no-show, you will be charged a \$25 no show fee for every subsequent one which must be paid before your next appointment, or a payment plan must be established. If you have three no-shows, or a combination of five no shows and cancellations, we will have to discuss a referral for outside services or other appropriate alternative arrangements with you.

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### **Pearland Services**

The Counseling and Mental Health Center provides therapy to UHCL students at the Pearland campus. At the present time therapy is offered on a limited schedule, and is not available during all the hours the Clear Lake office is open. Students enrolled at either campus are eligible for therapy at UHCL-Pearland. We provide individual and couples therapy, including initial consultation, at the Pearland campus.

All of the student services at UHCL-Pearland will take place in a central student services suite of offices. Your right to confidential therapy does not change due to which campus you have therapy appointments. However, due to the shared office space and shared receptionist/secretarial support, your identity may be known to student services staff that have to check you in for appointments and may see you coming or going. These staff members do not have access to your therapy records. In addition, they have undergone confidentiality training and have signed agreements to keep your identity confidential. In rare emergency situations, they may be called on as back-up to help us best serve your needs and provide you with the best services.

Because UHCL-Pearland support staff are not permitted access to client records to schedule appointments, all scheduling will happen through the Clear Lake office or with your therapist directly once you have started. The therapy hours at UHCL-Pearland are set times and each Pearland therapist is only at the Pearland campus for one shift per week and we cannot schedule appointments at Pearland at other times. If you need to be seen outside of the therapist's available times, you may have to travel to the Clear Lake campus.

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### **Teletherapy**

The Counseling and Mental Health Center endeavors to provide mental health services that are most accessible to students. Decisions about whether students may access mental health services via telehealth (Phone, Videoconferencing) follow the American Psychological Association and American Psychiatric Association Guidelines. The following are guidelines for telemental health services:

- First contact appointments and crisis appointments should be in-person whenever possible (exceptions may be made in certain circumstances).
- When deciding mode of service, clinicians will try to honor your preferences whenever possible; however, your therapist will consider many factors (i.e. clinical appropriateness, personal circumstance, etc.). Should circumstances change following the initiation of telemental health services, your clinician may request you resume in-person appointments.
- In order to participate in teletherapy, you must agree to the following:
  - There are potential benefits and risks of video-conferencing (e.g. limits to patient confidentiality) that differ from in-person sessions.
  - Confidentiality still applies for telepsychology services, and nobody will record the session without the permission from the others.
  - You agree to use the video-conferencing platform ZOOM selected for your virtual sessions, and the therapist will explain how to use it.
  - You need to use a webcam or smartphone during the session.
  - It is important to be in a quiet, private space that is free of distractions (including cell phone or other devices) during the session.
  - It is important to use a secure internet connection rather than public/free Wi-Fi.
  - It is important to be on time. If you need to cancel or change your tele-appointment, you must notify our office by phone.
  - We need a back-up plan (e.g., phone number where you can be reached) to restart the session or to reschedule it, in the event of technical problems.
  - We need a safety plan that includes your physical location during the session, at least one emergency contact, and the closest ER to your location, in the event of a crisis situation.

- Clients need to be a resident of Texas and teletherapy sessions need to be conducted in Texas.
- You agree to us sending the invitation for teletherapy to the email address on file.
- You consent to our office sending administrative documents, including but not limited to: Links to teletherapy appointments, letters informing you of the state of your account for cost of service, informed consent documents, or other administrative documentation to your provided email address on file.

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### **Counseling Records and Recording of Sessions**

It is our standard practice to use various methods for gathering data for the purpose of creating therapy records, including written notes and audio and video electronic recordings of sessions. These notes or recordings do not become part of your therapy record and are disposed of soon after the official record has been created. The official record is maintained in a secure electronic database and is retained for seven years in accordance with state law. (Refer to the Notice of Privacy and Confidentiality practices for details about your therapy record).

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### **Weather and University Closures**

During weather-related or other emergencies UHCL may be closed. At such times the Counseling and Mental Health Center will be closed and all therapy appointments will be cancelled. We advise you to check the UHCL hotline (281.283.2221) to check for campus closures at times of bad weather.

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### **Assessment of Services**

As part of the therapy process, clients are asked to provide standard information about themselves at initial consultation, during therapy, and at the termination of therapy. This information may be collected by questionnaire or interview format. The information is used to monitor the progress of clients, and is also summarized to assess the benefits provided by therapy services to all our clients. Results are de-identified and presented in aggregate form.

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### **Children in the Waiting Room**

Please make childcare arrangements, as it is not appropriate for children to accompany clients to therapy appointments. No child under 10 should ever be left unattended in the suite, as Counseling and Mental Health Center staff will be unable to watch your children, and are not responsible for unattended children. If there is a problem involving a child who has been left unattended the client's session will be interrupted and ended. Please be aware that any children brought into the office may be exposed to situations that could be disturbing to them.

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### **Consent for students under 18**

If you are under the age of 18, Texas State Law requires that we obtain permission from your parent or managing conservator/guardian in order to offer you therapy services, unless any of the following circumstances apply:

- You are on active duty in the armed forces.
- You are 16 years of age or older and reside apart from parents, conservator, or guardian AND manage your own financial affairs (regardless of the source of income).
- You are thinking about suicide.
- You have concerns about alcohol and/or drug addiction or dependency.
- You have been sexually, physically, or emotionally abused.

If you fall into one the above categories we can offer you therapy without parental/guardian consent. Under Texas State Law, parents/guardian may still have access to your therapy record and/or could talk with your clinician whether parental consent is necessary or not. If none of the above situations apply, we will need parental/guardian consent before your therapy begins. Please obtain written permission from your parent or managing conservator/guardian for therapy services before an appointment is scheduled.

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### **Social Media Policy**

**Friends:** Therapists do not accept friend or contact requests from current or former clients on any social networking site (e.g., Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.). Doing so can compromise your confidentiality and our respective privacy. In addition, it can confuse the boundaries set within a therapeutic relationship.

**Following:** Twitter and Pinterest allow anyone to follow you. Our therapists do not expect that you will follow them; however, if you choose to follow your therapist, you can expect that they will discuss this choice with you. Therapists do not follow current or former clients.

**Interacting:** Please do not use SMS (mobile phone text messaging) or messaging on Social Networking sites, such as Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn to contact a therapist. These sites are not secure and messages may not be read in a timely fashion. Do not use Wall postings, @replies, or other means of engaging with a therapist in public online.

**Use of Search Engines:** It is NOT a regular part of our practice to search for clients on Google or Facebook or other search engines. Extremely rare exceptions may be made during times of crisis, such as if there is reason to suspect you are in danger of hurting yourself or others, and attempts to contact you using other means have been unsuccessful (i.e., in person, phone, or email). There might be an instance, in which using a search engine to find you, someone close to you, or to check on your recent status updates, is necessary as part of ensuring your welfare. These are unusual situations and if our office ever resorts to such means, it will be documented and discussed with you.

**Email:** Use of email for electronic communication is not completely secure or confidential. As such, email communication is primarily used by our office for administrative reasons related to sending appointment links, scheduling/rescheduling missed appointments, providing/receiving relevant paperwork or resources. Please do not email content related to your therapy session to your therapist. In the event that you do choose to communicate with our office or your therapist via email, please note that all correspondence is documented in your client file and retained in the logs of the UHCL email server and your Internet Service Provider.

**Viewing:** A therapist will not view your online activity. Viewing your online activities without your consent and without our explicit arrangement towards a specific purpose could potentially have a negative influence on the working relationship. If there are things from your online life that you wish to share with your therapist, please bring them into your sessions where you can view and explore them together, during the therapy hour.

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### Termination of Therapy

Termination of therapy can occur for a number of reasons:

- You have reached your goals.
- You have reached the limits of the availability of our service.
- You would like to take time off from therapy.
- You feel that therapy is not helpful to you.
- You or your therapist believe that a different approach would be more helpful to you.
- You are no longer a currently enrolled UHCL student.

When any of these situations occur, it is important for you and your therapist to discuss the end of therapy to make certain that you have full mutual communication of your perceptions and feelings. Check-ups or follow-ups might sometimes be appropriate as well. Upon termination your file will be closed. If you fail to return for therapy and do not contact your therapist, your file will be closed. This does not exclude you from reinitiating services at a later date.

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*I have received and read the UHCL Counseling and Mental Health Center Client Handbook and Notice of Privacy and Confidentiality Practices. I understand and accept these policies, procedures, and guidelines for services, my responsibilities, and services offered, as described in this document. I authorize UHCL Counseling and Mental Health Center to provide professional services to me.*

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Printed Name

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Signature

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Date