



## Informed Consent for Online Counseling

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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, sign, and return.

### A. Process

1) Possible misunderstandings: The client should be aware that misunderstandings are possible with telephone, text-based modalities such as messaging, and real-time internet chat, because nonverbal 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. All sessions and messaging are in English.

2) Turnaround time: Using asynchronous (not in "real time") communication such as email or messaging entails a "lag" of response. The counselor will make every effort to respond to message requests within a 24-hour period. 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. Clients may also utilize 1-800-SUICIDE or 1- 800-273-TALK (For the deaf or hard-of hearing: 1-800-799-4TTY).

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. Allison Clifton, LPC has chosen to use Doxy.me 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, internet access points, and password security.

The counselor has a right to his 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 Facebook or YouTube. Counselor cannot become friends with clients on social media; such as Facebook, Twitter, etc...

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.

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.

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 Doxy.me for chat/ messaging and video communications to allow for the highest possible security and confidentiality of the content of your sessions. The website used for individual sessions is as follows: **<https://doxy.me/aclifton>** on either Google chrome or Firefox browsers. The online platform can be used on any device (desktop, laptop, phone, or even an iPad). The device just needs to have a camera and microphone. In order to benefit from these safeguards, the client is required to download, register and utilize the chat and video software from Doxy.me. Your personal information is encrypted and stored on a secure server in compliance with HIPAA regulations.

If the client uses a text only format, messages will be sent through your online account with the Therapy Appointment website. For group sessions, clients will receive an e-mail with an invite to my online group counseling room using the thera-LINK website. 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. The counselor and client will also choose a password in the first session to be exchanged at the beginning of all subsequent distance sessions in order to verify the identity of the client. 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. An alternative to receiving mental health services online would be receiving mental health services in person.

F. Payments: Payments for sessions can be done via phone to our office at 325-232-7530 or during your online session. Private pay fees for online sessions are negotiated on a case-by-case basis.

G. Disconnection of Services: If there is ever a disruption of services on the internet then the client will need to call Allison Clifton, LPC to discuss how to proceed with the session. Your counselor can be reached at 325-514-0930.

I understand that I have the freedom to choose to have counseling online by distance-counseling or teletherapy. I understand that there are risks to teletherapy, such as failure in technology or breaches of confidentiality.

By signing this consent I agree to abide by its content. I am aware that I have the freedom of choice of providers and I choose Allison Clifton, LPC to provide me with services.

\_\_\_\_\_  
(Full Name)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature/Date