

INFORMED CONSENT AND SERVICE AGREEMENT

Welcome to Safe Connections. This document contains important information about your rights, our services and guidelines. A copy of this document will be provided to you at the end of your appointment.

Therapy is a relationship that works in part because of clearly defined rights and responsibilities held by each person. This frame helps create safety for you to take risks and provides the support to become empowered to heal. As a client at Safe Connections, it is important for you to know about certain rights and responsibilities that are part of engaging in therapy.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THERAPY

Goals for Therapy

Goals in therapy are set based on the individual needs of the client and can differ from client to client. Safe Connections provides the option of no-cost longer term therapy for clients due to the various issues our clients have experienced. It is important to note that some goals will be reached successfully in a shorter time frame and other goals may take a longer period to reach. Since goals are individualized and may be impacted by various factors, not all goal may be achieved.

Once you begin individual therapy, your goals will be created in partnership with your therapist early in your treatment. Your therapist will meet with you to create an individualized treatment plan, which will include ongoing assessment of whether Safe Connections remains the best place to meet your treatment goals and what time frame may work best for you to complete your goals.

Goals will be reviewed with your therapist along the way, with a 12-15 month time frame in mind to complete your goals for therapy, and/or to review progress towards goals to determine if you are in need of a shorter or extended length of time in therapy to meet your overall treatment goals. Professional ethics mandate that treatment continues only if it is reasonably clear you are receiving benefit.

Benefits of Therapy

There are many benefits to therapy. Therapy can help you develop coping skills, make behavioral changes, reduce stress symptoms, improve the quality of your life, learn to live in the present and many other advantages.

Therapy is an intensely personal process which can, at times, bring unpleasant memories or emotions to the surface. There are no guarantees how therapy will work for you and progress may happen slowly. Therapy requires a very active effort on your part. In order to be most successful, you will have to work on things discussed outside of sessions.

Safety

Safe Connections is committed to providing a safe and healthy environment for both staff and clients. Safe Connections will not tolerate disruptive, threatening or violent acts committed by or against staff and clients. Acts of verbal or physical aggression and/or threats made to Safe Connections staff, clients or destruction of property, will be grounds for immediate cancellation of services.

Who Can Sign the Informed Consent?

Signing this consent form is voluntary although Safe Connections must receive a signed Informed Consent Form in order to offer counseling services to you. Clients under the age of 18 are considered minors and must have a parent or legal guardian sign a Parent/ Guardian Consent Form. The exception to this rule would be if you are an "emancipated minor." If you are unable to make your own health care decisions, you may sign the consent form but it must also be signed by your appointed guardian. If issues or disputes regarding joint custody decisions were to come to our attention, the agency has a right to confer with legal counsel to determine agency response or best course of action to respond.

SAFE CONNECTIONS RESPONSIBILITIES TO YOU

Confidentiality and Exceptions

Safe Connections will make every effort to keep your personal information private. If you wish to have information released to a third party, you will be required to sign a consent form before such information will be released. There are some limitations to confidentiality of which you need to be aware:

- Your therapist consults with a supervisor and other therapists at Safe Connections in order to provide the best service possible and to coordinate services. Should you choose to use the Safe Connections 24-hour Crisis Helpline for support; your therapist and the crisis advocate, may consult on the outcome of your call to support your safety and care. All agency representatives who have access to your information are required to keep it confidential.
- If your therapist receives a court order, we may be required to release some information. In such a case, we will limit the release to only what is necessary by law. Your therapist is obligated to discuss the risk versus benefits of releasing any confidential information even if you are making the request for release. If your therapist is required to appear in court on your behalf, fees may be incurred to compensate for the therapist's time.
- Staff at Safe Connections are mandated reporters and are required to report information to the appropriate state reporting agency if incidents of abuse and/or neglect to children, elderly or disabled persons are revealed during service delivery.
- Staff at Safe Connections are ethically responsible to report information to the appropriate emergency facility when clients pose a risk of harm to themselves or others.

Therapist Leave/Absence/Retirement

We will make arrangements for support or transfer during any periods of planned or unplanned absences, this may include temporary or permanent assignment to another therapist, phone check-in and /or development of individualized crisis plans. In some cases, a return to the waiting list or a referral out to other services may be necessary. Every effort will be made to include you in the process and planning for any pending transition.

Confidentiality for Adolescents

Except for situations such as those mentioned above, your therapist will not tell your parent/guardian specific things you share with him or her in private therapy sessions. This includes activities and behavior that your parent/guardian would not approve of—or would be upset by—but that do not put you at risk of serious and immediate harm. However, if your risk-taking behavior becomes more serious, your therapist will need to use his or her professional judgment to decide whether you are in serious and immediate danger of being harmed.

If your therapist feels that you are in danger, he or she will communicate this information to your parent/guardian. Please note that while parents/guardians have the legal right to view their child's file, this is discouraged, as privacy between a client and therapist is an essential part of the therapeutic process.

Confidentiality & Group Therapy

If you choose to participate in group therapy, be aware that your therapist cannot guarantee that other group members will maintain your confidentiality. Group participants are expected to respect the privacy of all other participants. Sharing other clients' personal information will be grounds for removal from group activities.

As noted above, your group therapist may communicate with your individual therapist for purposes of consultation and coordination of services.

Client Rights and Grievance

All services and treatment options at Safe Connections are completely voluntary. Clients have the right to fair, equitable services that are provided in a non-discriminatory manner which includes the right to consistent enforcement of program rules and expectations, to be treated with respect by all Safe Connections staff including access to services that are respectful of, and responsive to, your culture, communication and accommodation needs within our ability and resources. You have the right to take part in your treatment planning including the right to refuse any service or treatment option. Your therapist will provide you with information on some situations that could ethically limit their ability to continue to work with you if you choose to decline a specific treatment option that they feel will be benefit you.

You have the right to have complaints regarding your treatment heard by a supervisor. If the therapist supervisor is unable to resolve the situation to your satisfaction, you will be directed to the Clinical Director who will attempt to resolve the complaint within five working days. If you remain unsatisfied, you may appeal with the agency Executive Director. Complaints, written grievances and their responses will be noted in your case file.

A list of client rights is posted in the lobby and our non-discrimination statement provided later in this document. If you have questions about your rights any time during your services at Safe Connections, please address questions to your therapist or department supervisor.

YOUR RESPONSIBILITIES AS A SAFE CONNECTIONS CLIENT

Privacy & Use of Technology

Computer e-mail, texts, and e-fax communication, can be relatively easily accessed by unauthorized people and hence can compromise the privacy and confidentiality of such communication. E-mails, texts, and e-faxes, in particular, are vulnerable to such unauthorized access due to the fact that servers or communication companies may have unlimited and direct access to all e-mails, texts and e-faxes that go through them. It is always a possibility that e-faxes, texts, and e-mail can be sent erroneously to the wrong address and computers.

At your first session your therapist will discuss the use of technology, your preference for safe and accessible communication and options available for contact. If you choose to communicate confidential information via any unprotected electronic means such as use of the internet, email etc., it will be assumed that you have made an informed decision and your therapist will view it as your agreement to take the risk that such communication may be intercepted, and your desire to communicate on such matters will be honored. **Please do not use e-mail, text, voice mail, or faxes for emergencies as we cannot guarantee receipt of your communication or timely response.** Please note that any communication, including electronic, will become part of your clinical record.

To preserve the integrity of the therapeutic relationship and protect your confidentiality, any friend requests through social media sites such as Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook etc. cannot be returned by your therapist.

Attendance

Appointments will be approximately 50 minutes in length, once per week at an agreed-upon time. The time scheduled for your appointment is assigned to you and you alone.

We ask that all appointments be cancelled 24 hours in advance. If the agency is closed because of weather, or if your therapist has an emergency, we will make every effort to notify you. Please be sure that the agency has your most current phone number, including a number where a message might be left in case of emergency.

Regular attendance is very important to your progress in treatment. Also, because so many clients are waiting for our services, we need to make the best use of therapists' and clients' time. Therefore, a client's failure to attend sessions may be grounds to end therapy. Following three unexcused absences from therapy, or if canceling on short notice becomes habitual, you will be given the option of ending therapy or returning to the waiting list. You will be given this option only once.

Inconsistent attendance that interferes with meeting treatment goals could also result in termination of therapy or a return to the waiting list. If you feel that you are unable to commit to regular

attendance or goals set forth in therapy, you may choose to end therapy and return at a time when you are better able to attend therapy on a consistent basis.

We understand that people's schedules do change. If your schedule changes, your therapist may or may not be able to accommodate a change of appointment time. If not, you may need to return to the waiting list until another appointment time that will work for your schedule becomes available.

ENDING TREATMENT

The ideal reason for ending therapy is that a client's concerns have been addressed to his or her satisfaction. While it is best for therapy to end through mutual agreement with your therapist once your goals have been reached, you have the right to end therapy at any time.

There are a few situations in which your therapist may need to end treatment with you:

- If you are meeting with another individual therapist, in order to avoid replicating services, you must first terminate treatment with that therapist before Safe Connections can begin providing individual therapy services. If you remain in therapy with an outside therapist and this becomes apparent during your course of therapy at Safe Connections, your therapist is ethically required to discuss termination of treatment if you decide to continue in therapy with the other individual therapist.

Exceptions to this would be if you are seeking outside treatment for a reason that is not addressed in your therapy at Safe Connections. Examples could include couples/family counseling, substance abuse treatment, or spiritual counseling. If you are working with another professional, your therapist may need a release of information from you so that he or she may communicate freely with that individual about your care and progress. Your therapist may also request a letter of termination from your prior therapist prior to continuing in therapy at safe Connections.

- If through the course of therapy, it becomes evident that your needs or presenting symptoms are outside of your therapist's and/or Safe Connection's scope of competence or practice, your therapist may decide it is appropriate to end treatment. Professional ethics mandate that treatment continues only if it is reasonably clear you are receiving benefit. If any of these events occur your therapist will discuss all available options to continue or attempt to ensure a smooth transition to other sources of care that would be more appropriate for your needs.
- Sometimes unforeseen conflicts of interest may happen. If we become aware of such a conflict you will be told in advance or as soon as possible after such conflicts become apparent. If a conflict of interest should interfere with your services, we will discuss all available options open to you so you may continue your treatment without conflict.
- Other legal or ethical circumstances may arise that may impact a decision to end treatment. A breach in therapist privacy and or safety by the client would be cause to terminate therapy immediately. In these cases, as appropriate, referrals will be offered.

Closing from therapy services will terminate your care and change your status to “closed” with your assigned therapist. Your therapist will provide information verbally and or/by letter in most cases to discuss conditions needed to return to therapy in the future. The 24-Crisis Helpline will remain available to all clients even after ending therapy.

Conflict of Interest/Dual Relationships with Testimonials

After ending therapy some clients may feel a desire to give back to a cause that has offered them support. Where we appreciate the gesture, speaking at events and or sharing your story would present a conflict with our ability to offer future care. Please note that no client should ever feel that there is an obligation, or pressure, to offer testimonials and/or to share a personal story on social media or at agency events. If you have questions about this conflict of interest, please check in with your therapist.

Evaluation

We value your feedback in providing quality services. At the end of therapy, we will ask you to complete a confidential feedback form to provide information about the services you received at Safe Connections. You are not required to complete this survey as a condition to return to therapy.

COMMUNICATION WITH YOUR THERAPIST

Agency policy does not allow Therapist to give out their private contact information and/ or text with clients. Clients who need to leave a message for their therapist can call the business line at 314-646-7500. **If there is an emergency after hours, clients may reach their therapists by calling the Crisis Helpline at 314-531-2003.** Your therapist will review the process of reaching them in an emergency or after hours at your first session. Please note that reaching your therapist through the Crisis Helpline is not guaranteed. **Canceling your appointment is not considered an emergency.**

Business hours are as followed: Monday-Thursday 8 a.m. – 8 p.m., Friday 8 a.m. – 5 p.m., Saturday 8 a.m. – 1 p.m. Sunday Closed

E-mail may not be available to the therapists when they are outside of the office. Therefore, we strongly advise you not to send any messages pertaining to a crisis situation by e-mail. Any and all communication, including e-mail or other forms of electronic communications, between clients and staff at Safe Connections will be included in your client record.

PLEASE CONTINUE TO NEXT PAGE FOR SIGNATURE

I HAVE READ THE ABOVE INFORMATION, AGREE TO ITS CONTENT, AND REQUEST THAT SAFE CONNECTIONS PROVIDE SERVICES TO ME.

Client Signature

Date

Parent/Legal Guardian Signature (if applicable)

Date

Assessment Therapist Signature

Date

Therapist Signature

Date reviewed

The mission of Safe Connections is to reduce the impact and incidence of relationship violence and sexual assault through education, crisis intervention, counseling and support services. *We do not discriminate on the basis of race, color, sex, citizenship status, national origin, ancestry, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, age, religion, creed, physical or mental disability, marital status, veteran status, political affiliation, or any other factor protected by law.*