



## **INFORMED CONSENT**

Welcome to the Renewing Life Center. We appreciate the opportunity to serve you and your family. This document contains important information about our services and is designed to help you understand the professional relationship that exists between you and your counselor. Please note any questions you may have so you can discuss them with your counselor. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between us.

### **Renewing Life Center services and counselors:**

The Renewing Life Center is a nonprofit Christian counseling center. Each counselor at the Renewing Life Center approaches their work as a therapist through a biblical worldview and seeks to ethically integrate faith into the counseling process. Many clients choose to come to the center because of this integration, others come for different reasons. We recognize and respect the diversity in all of our clients and offer services to all people regardless of differences in faith or background.

The Renewing Life Center has different types of counselors:

- Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists and Licensed Professional Counselors.
- Pastoral counselors who have a minimum of a Master's degree and extensive experience in pastoral counseling.
- Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist Interns and Licensed Professional Counselor Interns.
- Student interns who are in the final stage of graduate studies in their Marriage and Family Therapy or Licensed Professional Counseling program.
- Student interns are supervised by Mark Whelchel MS. LMFT

Your therapist will discuss their background, licensure and educational background with you.

### **The Therapeutic Process:**

Therapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of both the therapist and the client and the particular problems being addressed. Different counselors will use different approaches, counseling techniques, and interventions depending on the client and the counseling issues being presented. Therapy also calls for a very active effort on your part.

The therapy process can have benefits and risks. Change is difficult and the process of change can sometimes be uncomfortable. Because therapy often includes discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness and helplessness. These painful feelings are usually a normal part of the process on the way towards healing. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. But, there are no guarantees as to what you will experience. Questions about the therapeutic process are always welcome.

In order to provide the very best services possible, counselors will compile written case notes which include diagnosis, treatment plans, all clinical notes, correspondence, and signed documents. Student interns may also record sessions (audio and/or video) for supervision and training purposes with their clinical supervisors. All materials are subject to the strict confidentiality guidelines described in this document. Case notes (as required by state law) are kept for a minimum of five (5) years for adults and for five years after a minor client turns 18, and audio or video recordings are destroyed immediately after supervision.

Therapy sessions are 50 minutes long.

### **Confidentiality:**

In general, the privacy of all communications between a client and a therapist is protected by law and your counselor can only release information about your sessions and communication with your written permission. But there are a few exceptions which are described below:

- **Duty to Warn and Protect**

If your therapist has reason to believe that you will harm another person, your therapist must attempt to inform them of your intentions and contact the appropriate authorities to ask them to protect your intended victim.

- **Duty to protect against suicide**

If your therapist believes that you are in imminent danger of harming yourself or ending your life and you are unwilling to take steps to guarantee your safety, your therapist is obligated to call the appropriate authorities.

- **Abuse of Children and Vulnerable Adults**

If your therapist has reason to believe that you are currently or have previously abused or neglected a minor or a vulnerable adult, or if you give your therapist information that someone else is doing this, your therapist must inform the appropriate authorities. Mental healthcare professionals are also required to report admitted prenatal exposure to controlled substances that are potentially harmful.

- **Insurance Providers** (when applicable)

Insurance companies and other third-party payers are given information they request regarding services to clients. Information that may be requested includes type of services, dates/times of services, diagnosis, treatment plan, and description of impairment, progress of therapy, case notes, and summaries.

- **Court Orders**

Occasionally the court may, by power of subpoena, attempt to obtain the release of privileged information against the client's wishes. In such cases, your therapist will attempt to protect your confidentiality, but success at doing so cannot be guaranteed and your therapist may be ordered to release information or take deposition.

- **Board Complaints**

If a client makes a complaint against a therapist, the therapist will be required to use the notes and content from all therapy sessions and client communications to address the complaint with the board and/or any other governing agency.

- **Professional Consultation**

Your counselor may consult with other mental health professionals about your case in a confidential manner to gain additional insight and improve the services offered to you. If you are seeing an intern, the intern will be discussing your case with their approved supervisor in order to give you the best possible treatment. The consultant and/or supervisor is also legally bound to confidentiality in these circumstances. The intern will inform you of the names of their supervisors.

### **Addendum for Couples Counseling:**

When you come to the Renewing Life Center for couples counseling, you (as a couple) become the client. Most of the time, counseling sessions will take place with both of you in the session. However, you and/or the therapist may request individual sessions to do work which will benefit the couple relationship. The following guidelines will guide this work:

1. Both parties are aware and in agreement that an individual session is being scheduled.
2. What is said in individual sessions will be considered part of the couples therapy. Information from individual sessions can and probably will be discussed in the joint couples sessions. Do not tell your therapist anything you wish to be kept secret from your partner.
3. The therapist may decline to do an individual session if the therapist does not believe that it would be beneficial to the couples therapy. The therapist may also give referrals for additional individual therapy.
4. Both parties agree that they will not request or subpoena the therapist or the therapist's records for any divorce or other legal proceedings against their partner. Because you (as a couple) are the client, the therapist will not testify or serve as a witness for either one of you against the other. It is agreed that any release of information from couples sessions to third parties must be agreed upon by both members of the couple.

### **Addendum for Counseling Minors:**

1. Parental consent. It is the policy of the Renewing Life Center to have all legal parents/guardians sign their consent for their child to receive counseling at the center. If it is physically impossible to obtain the signatures of all parents/guardians, the parent or guardian seeking treatment will need to provide the center with the most recent custody papers or legal documents which demonstrate your right to authorize treatment for your child.
2. Parents or guardians usually decide when a child's therapy will continue and when it will end. If either parent decides that therapy should end, your counselor will honor that decision unless there are extraordinary circumstances. In most cases, your counselor will ask that you allow them the option of having a few closing sessions with your child to appropriately end the treatment relationship.

3. The parents and guardians of a child have the right to information about their child's counseling services. A minor does not have the right of confidentiality from their parents/guardians. However, therapy is most effective when a trusting relationship exists between the counselor and the patient. Privacy is very important in earning and keeping that trust especially when treating adolescents. Counselors at the Renewing Life Center will provide you with general information about your child's treatment but not share specific information without your child's permission. Exceptions to this rule will be decided by the counselor, client and parent/guardian at the beginning of the treatment.

4. In the course of treatment, the counselor may meet with the parents/guardians or other family members, together or separately, for the purposes of treating your child. If your child's counselor meets with you or other family members in the course of your child's treatment, notes of that meeting are included in your child's records. Please be aware that those notes are available to any person or entity who has legal access to your child's treatment records.

5. All of the limits to confidentiality described earlier in this document apply to your child's treatment as well.

6. Parents or guardians agree not to use their child's counselor or their therapy records in custody and/or other litigation. When a family is in conflict, especially conflict leading towards separation and divorce, this is especially distressing for children. Therefore, it is agreed that the counselor's role will be strictly limited to providing treatment for your child and not be sought for testimony in a family's litigation. By signing this document, you agree that you will not request or subpoena your counselor's records or ask your counselor to testify in court, whether in person or by affidavit, or ask your child's counselor to provide letters or documentation expressing their opinion about parental fitness or custody/visitation arrangements. Please note that your agreement may not prevent a judge from requiring your counselor's testimony which your counselor will avoid unless legally compelled. There are counselors who work specifically with mediation and a referral can be provided if you desire this type of service.

#### **Fees for Services:**

The Renewing Life Center has a sliding scale fee based on household income and the type of clinician you are seeing. You will be made aware of your fee for services prior to scheduling your first appointment. Payment for services are made to Renewing Life Center at the time of service. We take cash, check, or the following credit cards: Visa, MasterCard and American Express.

#### **Cancellation Policy:**

When you schedule an appointment, your appointment time is being held exclusively for you and you will be charged for your appointment time whether or not you attend. If you are unable to attend your session and you give a **24-hour cancellation notice** your fee will be waived. If you are late to your appointment your counselor will still need to end on time in order to not run into the next person's session. If your counselor is late to your appointment you will still be given your full 50-minute therapy hour. Additional professional services requested by you such as letter writing, reports, and meetings on your behalf will be billed at the same rate.

**Fees for Court Services:**

Counselors from the Renewing Life Center are not available to testify for you in court. Our counselors will not agree to attend court with you but we recognize they may receive a subpoena to appear. If you, your attorney, a judge, or another attorney subpoenas your counselor to appear in court or take a deposition for your court case, you agree to pay for their time. Because of the unpredictability of the time requirements of court, our experience has shown that your counselor will need to block a full day in their schedule to appear in court. The counselors fee for appearing in court is \$150 per hour or \$1,200 for the day. You agree to pay this fee in advance for this service. A five-day cancellation notice (Because of the time it takes to rebook a full day) is required to receive a refund of your fee.

**Contacting Your Therapist and Emergencies:**

The Renewing Life Center is open from 9-5 Monday through Friday (Except for legal holidays). We do not have 24-hour emergency or "on call" coverage. If you believe you will need a counseling center with 24-hour coverage we are happy to give you referrals. If you have an after-hours or weekend mental health emergency, please call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. You can reach your counselor during regular business hours. However, therapeutic issues will normally only be discussed during a scheduled appointment. Phone and email communication should be used for scheduling or other questions you may have for your counselor. Please be aware that phone, email and other forms of electronic communication are not completely confidential forms of communication.

**Weekend and Evening appointments:**

The Renewing Life Center offers weekend and evening appointments. While the office is closed during these times, advance appointments can be made for counseling. Weekend and evening appointments are paid for in advance.

**Client Rights:**

You have the right to ask questions about anything that happens in counseling. Your counselor is always willing to discuss any part of your therapy with you or engage in other therapeutic approaches you believe might be helpful to you. While your counselor will be following their treatment plan, you can and should have a very active voice in your overall counseling experience. If you have concerns or you are unhappy with any aspect of your therapy, we hope you will discuss these concerns with your counselor; your counselor is open to any feedback you have for them.

You have the right to end therapy at any time without any moral or legal obligations. The only financial obligations in ending therapy will be those already accrued. It is also a best practice to let your counselor know when you are considering discontinuing therapy so there is opportunity to gain good closure for the work you have done in counseling. The Renewing Life Center will not keep inactive counseling cases in an open status if the client is no longer attending counseling. When a client has not made appointments or received counseling for a period of 45 days the counseling relationship will automatically terminate at that time and the client file will be considered closed. Of course, the client is free to reopen their case and return to counseling again at any time. Depending on the length of time, new forms may be required to be filled out and signed when returning to counseling.

**Signatures:**

Your signature below indicates you have read and understood the information in this document and agree to abide by its terms.

PATIENT SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

PATIENT SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

- If the patient(s) above is a minor, please sign below:

As a parent/legal guardian I have read and understood the information in this document and agree to abide by its terms. I give my permission for my child to receive counseling services at the Renewing Life Center.

PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_

PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE \_\_\_\_\_