FURMAN UNIVERSITY COUNSELING CENTER

PSYCHOTHERAPIST-PATIENT SERVICES AGREEMENT

Welcome to the Counseling Center. This document (the Agreement) contains important information about our professional services and policies. Although this document may seem long and complex, it is very important that you read it carefully and discuss any questions you have about the procedures with your therapist. When you sign this document, it will constitute your agreement for us to provide counseling services as described below. You may revoke this Agreement in writing at any time. That revocation will be binding on the Counseling Center prospectively only. It will not apply to any action already taken by the Counseling Center based on your previous consent to this Agreement given either in writing or by following treatment prescribed by the Counseling Center.

COUNSELING SERVICES
Counselors are health care professionals trained in the assessment and treatment of a broad range of psychological concerns and interpersonal problems. Dr. Dawes is a Licensed Psychologist, Ms. Praytor, Ms. Smith, and Mr. Belle are Licensed Independent Social Workers, and Ms. Clark is a Licensed Professional Counselor. South Carolina provides the consumer the opportunity to file inquiries with its Board of Examiners for Psychology, for Social Work, and for Counselors. Board offices may be reached at: SC Board of Examiners in Psychology, SC Board of Social Work Examiners, or SC Board of Examiners for Counselors and Therapists, P.O. Box 11329, Columbia, SC 29211-1329.
Counseling or psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the therapist and patient, and the particular problems you are experiencing. There are many different methods your therapist may use to deal with the problems that you hope to address. Therapy is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, it calls for a very active effort on your part. In order for the therapy to be most successful, you will have to work on things you and your therapist talk about both during sessions and between sessions.
Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. On the other hand, psychotherapy has also been shown to have many benefits. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and reductions in feelings of distress. But there are no guarantees of what you will experience.
Your first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, your therapist will be able to offer you some first impressions of what your therapy will include and a treatment plan to follow, if you decide to continue with therapy. You should evaluate this information along with your own opinions of whether you feel comfortable working with this therapist. Therapy involves a large commitment of time and energy, so you should be very careful about the therapist you select. If you have questions about the therapy procedures, you should discuss them with your therapist whenever they arise. If your doubts persist, the therapist will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.

MEETINGS
The initial evaluation usually will last from 1 to 2 sessions. During this time, you and your therapist can both decide if your therapist, the recommended therapy, and the Counseling Center program are best suited to provide the services you need in order to meet your treatment goals. If psychotherapy is begun, it is typical to schedule one appointment hour (of 45-50 minutes duration) usually at intervals of no more than once a week and at a time agreeable to you and your therapist. Once you have set an appointment, that time will be held for you. It is therefore extremely important that you keep scheduled appointments or, if you are unable to do so, that you notify the Center’s administrative assistant at least 24 hours prior to the appointment so that time can be made available for someone else.

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SCOPE OF SERVICES

Furman students are eligible for up to a maximum of 12 individual therapy sessions (including the initial assessment) during an academic year. Problems that require more intensive, specialized, or longer-term care may not fall within the scope of our program. If this is the case, your therapist will make you aware of potential resources for your needs in the community. Group programs are offered to supplement individual counseling and are not subject to the 12 session limit.

CONTACTING YOUR THERAPIST

Due to our work schedules, therapists are often not immediately available by telephone. When your therapist is unavailable, the Counseling Center’s Administrative Assistant will take messages or you will have an opportunity to leave a voice mail message. Therapists will make every effort to return calls on the same day they are received, with the exception of weekends and holidays. If you are difficult to reach, please inform the therapist of some times when you will be available.

E-mail can be useful for communicating about scheduling appointments and brief “status reports.” Attempts to communicate about more substantive issues and problems using e-mail are probably inappropriate. There are occasions when the therapist may be unable to check e-mail in a timely manner and might miss your message. Not only is it less reliable and less practical, you should also remember that the confidentiality of e-mail cannot be guaranteed.

In an emergency situation after hours or on weekends, you can contact the University Health Services office or University Police for immediate attention, assessment, and referral. If possible, they may assist you in contacting your therapist or, if he or she is unavailable, another therapist from the Counseling Center. If your therapist will be unavailable for an extended time, you make seek help from his or her colleagues in the Counseling Center if necessary.

LIMITS ON CONFIDENTIALITY

The law protects the privacy of all communications between a patient and a therapist. In most situations, your therapist can only release information about your treatment to others if you sign a written authorization form that meets certain legal requirements. There are other situations that require only that you provide written, advance consent. Your signature on this Agreement provides consent for those activities, as follows:

• Therapists may occasionally find it helpful to consult other health and mental health professionals about a case. During a consultation, therapists make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of patients. The other professionals are also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you don’t object, your therapist will not tell you about these consultations unless he or she feels that it is important to your work together. All consultations will be noted in your Clinical Record.

• You should be aware that the Counseling Center is a group mental health practice involving several professionals and an administrative staff. In most cases, therapists need to share protected information with these colleagues for both clinical and administrative purposes, such as scheduling and quality assurance. All of the mental health professionals are bound by the same rules of confidentiality. All staff members have been given training about protecting your privacy and have agreed not to release any information outside of the practice without the permission of a professional staff member.

• The Counseling Center also has contracts with psychiatrists, a part-time therapist and a nutritionist. These individuals have also agreed to maintain the confidentiality of personal information about our clients except as specifically allowed in the contract or otherwise required by law.

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There are some situations where therapists are permitted or required to disclose information without either your consent or authorization:

- Parents or legal guardians of nonemancipated minor patients (under 18 years of age) have the right to access the patient’s records.
- If you are involved in a court proceeding and a request is made for information concerning the professional services provided to you by the Counseling Center, such information is protected by the therapist-patient privilege law. The therapist cannot provide any information without your written authorization, or a court order. If you are involved in or contemplating litigation, you should consult with your attorney to determine whether a court would be likely to order a disclosure of privileged information.
- If a government agency is requesting the information for health oversight activities, the therapist is required to provide it to them.
- If a patient files a complaint or lawsuit against a therapist, the therapist may disclose relevant information regarding that patient as part of his or her self-defense.
- If a patient who is in therapy files a workers’ compensation claim, the therapist may, upon appropriate request, be required to provide otherwise confidential information to the patient’s employer, the insurer, or the Workers’ Compensation Commission.

There are some situations in which therapists are legally obligated to take actions, which are considered necessary to attempt to protect others from harm and therapists may have to reveal some information about a patient’s treatment. These situations are unusual in our practice.

**Situations involving abuse/neglect or intent to commit a crime**

- If therapists receive information that gives reason to believe that a child’s physical or mental health or welfare has been or may be adversely affected by abuse or neglect, or by acts or omissions that would be abuse or neglect if committed by a parent or other caretaker, the law requires that the therapist file a report with the county Department of Social Services. If your therapist believes that a child has been or may be abused or neglected by any other person, he or she must report that to the appropriate law enforcement agency. Once such a report is filed, therapists may be required to provide additional information.
- If your therapist has reason to believe that a vulnerable adult has been or is likely to be abused, neglected, or exploited, the law requires that the therapist file a report to the Adult Protective Services Program. Once such a report is filed, the therapist may be required to provide additional information.
- If a patient reveals his or her intent to commit a crime, therapists may be required to take preventative action, such as calling the police.

**Situations involving potential harm to self or others**

- If a therapist believes that a patient presents a clear and substantial risk of imminent, serious harm to another, he or she may be required to take protective action, including notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, and/or seeking hospitalization for the patient.
- **In compliance with Furman University policy, if a student is assessed to be at serious risk to harm himself/herself, the therapist may be obligated to notify the Vice President for Student Life, to contact family members or others who can help provide protection, and to seek hospitalization for the student.**
- **If a Counseling Center patient is hospitalized as part of their treatment, University policy requires the Counseling Center to inform the Vice President of Student Life or designee of the hospitalization.**
Finally, situations sometimes arise when a student’s condition is assessed to be potentially dangerous if the student is not involved in appropriate treatment, and the student is not following through with the recommended treatment. Consistent with Furman University policy, in these situations, Counseling Center staff will inform the Vice President for Student Life for follow-up assessment and recommendations.

If such a situation arises, your therapist will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action and will limit the disclosure of information to what is necessary.

While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important that you and your therapist discuss any questions or concerns that you may have now or in the future. The laws governing confidentiality can be quite complex, and in situations where specific advice is required, formal legal consultation may be needed.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDS
The laws and standards of our profession require that we keep Protected Health Information about you in your Clinical Record. Except in unusual circumstances that involve danger to yourself and/or others or where information has been supplied to the therapist confidentially by others, or the record makes reference to another person (unless such other person is a health care provider) and your therapist believes that access is reasonably likely to cause substantial harm to such other person, you may examine and/or receive a copy of your Clinical Record if you request it in writing. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. For this reason, we recommend that you initially review them in the presence of your therapist or have them forwarded to another mental health professional so you can discuss the contents. If a therapist refuses your request for access to your records, you have a right of review (except for information supplied to the therapist confidentially by others), which your therapist will discuss with you upon request.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and agree to abide by its terms during your professional relationship with the Counseling Center.

Signature:____________________________________ Date:___________________

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