**Background and Services**

Welcome to Mindful Lotus Counselling (MLC). The mission of MLC is to provide high quality counselling and to make quality mental health care available to everyone. With our mission guiding our service delivery and our belief that mental health care is a right, we strive to help individuals work through their concerns in a safe environment while ensuring safe and ethical practices. This document contains important information. Please review the information carefully, discuss any questions with your counsellor and sign the document.

**Aims of Counselling**

The aim of counselling is to provide you, the client, with an opportunity to explore personal and relational issues in a safe and confidential environment. The role of the counsellor is to help you through this process without judgment or offering advice. During counselling, the client and counsellor will set goals and the client endeavours to work towards these goals. If at any time the counsellor feels they are unable to help you, they will offer to refer you to someone who can.

**Sessions**

Sessions last 60 minutes. It is expected that the session will begin at the agreed time. Any session that begins after this time, due to a client arriving late for whatever reason, cannot be extended beyond the agreed finish time. If you do not arrive or call within 15 minutes of the agreed appointment, this will be considered a cancellation and the counsellor will not be available for the remainder of the session. If you are unable to attend your appointment, please cancel at least 24 hours beforehand, otherwise, you will be charged for a full session. The end of the counselling relationship will automatically occur if there has been no contact between client and therapist for six (6) weeks (any fees that have been paid and unused for a session will be forfeited).

**End of Counselling**

You have a right to withdraw from counselling at any time. However, we ask that you notify your counsellor of your voluntary ending of counselling. Counselling ideally will come to an end when it is mutually agreed upon by the client and counsellor.

**Referrals**

If, for any reason, your counsellor is unable to meet your needs, then you will be referred to another qualified professional. This will be discussed with you and will only occur with your consent.

**Emergencies**

MLC has no emergency or after-hours services. If you experience an emergency outside of a session you should contact your nearest hospital emergency department or call 000. Alternatively, you may call a 24-hour telephone crisis counselling service, Lifeline on 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service on 1300 659 467. During your sessions, you will also discuss how to handle emergencies with your counsellor.

**Code of Ethics**

Your MLC counsellor is bound by the Code of Ethics and Practice set out by the Australian Counsellors Associations (ACA) and will adhere to their guidelines.

**Confidentiality**

It is the policy of MLC to protect the privacy of every client and maintain confidentiality to the maximum extent. MLC will not disclose your personal information unless:
a. The individual concerned has given prior written approval to discuss the information with another person or organisation or to provide a written report to other agencies
b. MLC believes on reasonable grounds that the disclosure is necessary to prevent or lessen a serious and imminent threat to the life or health of the individual concerned or of another person
c. There is suspicion or knowledge of child abuse and/or neglect, or elder abuse and/or neglect
d. The disclosure is required or authorised by or under law

To ensure the provision of quality care, counsellors regularly meet with supervisors to discuss client counselling services. Any records or information disclosed to a supervisor will be de-identified to protect the client’s confidentiality. All ACA certified supervisors and staff are obligated to follow the confidentiality guidelines set forth by the Australian Counselling Association Code of Ethics and Practice (2019) and the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) as amended by the Privacy Amendment (Enhancing Privacy Protection) Act 2012.

**Couples Therapy**

Your counsellor has a Level 1 and 2 certificate with the Gottman Institute. We use an integrated approach using the Gottman method and other effective couples therapy interventions.

Gottman Method Couples Therapy consists of five parts:

* Assessment (3 sessions)
* Treatment
* "Phasing Out" of Therapy
* Termination
* Outcome Evaluation

**Assessments**

Assessment requires about 4.5 hours in 3 or 4 sessions. It also requires online assessments to be completed at the expense of the client prior to the first assessment session.

Online assessments will be invoiced to the client with the first assessment session (fees are subject to change without notice as MLC does not set pricing for these assessments). A link will be sent by the counsellor to the Gottman Institute website for completion of these questionnaires prior to the first session.

The components of the assessment are as follows:

* Session #1 - Intake Interviews - 90 minutes
* Session #2 - Individual Interviews - 45 minutes/ea. (90 total)
* Session #3 - Treatment Planning - 90 minutes

Assessment sessions must be completed within a 30-day period (continuation past this point for assessment sessions due to extenuating circumstances is subject to MLC owner discretion)

Discount 3 packs of assessment sessions are valid for 30 days. We reserve the right to retain funds for unused sessions in the event a client does not contact MLC to book the remaining assessment sessions within those 30 days. The client reserves the right to request a refund of the remaining sessions in the event they would like to cease services prior to completion of the 3 assessment sessions within those 30 days. This refund request will void the discount pack and revert fees to the full fee amount for client-used services ($180 per assessment session) client will have funds returned less this altered fee amount.

**Confidentiality in Couples Therapy**

Our confidentiality policy also stands for couples therapy. However, MLC couples therapy has a no-secret policy between individuals in the couple. All information disclosed to the counsellor will be privy to the other individual. In the event information is disclosed that the individual is not willing to share with their partner then the counsellor will cease couples counselling and discuss referral to another therapist.

**Privacy and Personal Information**

**Collection and Purpose of Personal Information**

An important part of providing counselling services includes collecting, recording and retaining information relevant to the client’s situation and counselling progress. This information is a necessary part of the services provided and delivers relevant and informed counselling services. Please ensure you provide honest and comprehensive information to help us meet your counselling needs. You do not need to give your personal information, however, if you do not it may impact our service delivery.

MLC will only collect personal information from individuals by fair and lawful means. The information collected is treated in a confidential manner and is only seen by those who need to see the information to support you in your counselling. In collecting personal information MLC will comply with the requirements of the Australian Privacy Principles (APPs) set out in the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) as amended by the Privacy Amendment (Enhancing Privacy Protection) Act 2012.

**Storage and Security of Information**

MLC will securely store all records containing personal information and will take all reasonable steps to protect the personal information it holds from misuse, loss, unauthorised access, modification or disclosure.

Your counselling records and personal information will be kept by MLC for a period of seven (7) years from the date of your last contact with the clinic. After which reasonable steps will be taken to destroy or de-identify personal information and counselling records, as set out in the Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) as amended by the Privacy Amendment (Enhancing Privacy Protection) Act 2012.

**Minors**

If clients are under 18 years of age, the law may provide parents/guardians the right to examine client records. In such cases, parents will be provided with general information about the counsellor and client’s work together. If there is a high risk that the minor is a serious risk to themselves or others, then parents/guardians will be notified of these concerns. Parents/Guardians will also be provided a summary of the minor’s counselling when completed, however before giving them any information, the counsellor will discuss the matter with the minor and do their best to address any objections the minor may have.

**Accessing Client Information and Correcting Records**

Clients have a right to access and review what material is recorded in their file, subject to exceptions in relevant legislation (Privacy Amendment (Private Sector) Act 2000 and Privacy Amendment (Enhancing Private Protection) Act 2012).

Requests to access or obtain personal information must be made in writing. Clients will be advised of how they may access or obtain a copy of their personal information and any applicable fees within 10 days of receiving their written request. Where it is reasonable to do so, access to the information will be provided in the manner requested by the individual.

If a client considers their personal information to be incorrect, incomplete, out of date or misleading, they can request that the information be amended. Where a record is found to be inaccurate, a correction will be made as soon as practical. Where a client requests that a record be amended because it is inaccurate but the record is found to be accurate, the details of the request for amendment will be noted on the record.

Written requests for access to, to obtain a copy of, or correct personal information held by MLC should be sent to: mindfullotuscounselling@gmail.com

**Complaints**

MLC aims to provide all our clients with high quality mental health care. In the event that you are dissatisfied with the services you are receiving or have a complaint, we encourage you to talk with your counsellor to see if the complaint can be responded to and resolved at that level.

**Rights and Responsibilities of Clients**

**Rights of Clients**

As a client you have certain rights. These include the right:
1. To be treated with dignity and respect, free from any verbal, physical, emotional or sexual abuse.
2. To have equal consideration and treatment, regardless of your sex, gender, race, religion, economic status, age, sexual preference or beliefs.
3. To be provided with professional and respectful care by your counsellor.
4. To be listened to in a non-judgmental way.
5. To have your counsellor make fair and reasonable decisions about counselling and care.
6. To confidentiality within counselling with the following exceptions: where the client gives permission for confidence to be broken; where the counsellor is mandated by a court of law; or where the information is of great severity that confidentiality cannot be maintained, such as crime or terrorism and where information reveals actual or potential serious physical harm to self or others.

**Responsibilities of Clients**

Clients also have certain responsibilities. These are:
1. To be honest, open and willing to share concerns with your counsellor.
2. To ask questions when you do not understand, or you need clarification.
3. To maintain your appointments or give at least 24 hours’ notice if you need to cancel.
4. To treat your counsellor with respect.
5. To arrive to your appointment on time.
6. To not consume alcohol or take any illicit drugs prior to the session.

**Payment and Cancellation Policy**

Mindful Lotus Counselling requires payment 48 hours prior to your session, failure to pay may result in your appointment being cancelled.

Please be advised that we require 24 hours notice for any cancellations or reschedules via email or text [(mindfullotuscounselling@gmail.com](%28mindfullotuscounselling%40gmail.com) | 0403 756 887). Cancellations or reschedules made with less than 24 hours notice will be subject to a charge of the full service rate (no refunds will be issued).

Discount packs for individual counselling sessions are valid for 2 months (60 days), MLC holds the right to not honour unused sessions past this period (Discount packs unavailable as of September 2023)

Discount packs for couples assessment sessions are valid for 30 days, MLC holds the right to not honour unused sessions past this period. We reserve the right to retain funds for unused sessions in the event a client does not contact MLC to book remaining assessment sessions within those 30 days. (Discount packs unavailable as of September 2023)

Discount packs for couple's intervention sessions are valid for 45 days. MLC holds the right to not honour unused sessions past this period. We reserve the right to retain funds for unused sessions in the event a client does not contact MLC to book the remaining sessions within those 45 days. (Discount packs unavailable as of September 2023)

Extenuating circumstances to the above discount pack validity periods are subject to the discretion of MLC owner.

Refund requests for discount packs: in the event a client would like to cease services and requests a refund of their remaining sessions in a discount pack, all discount pack fees will be voided and the full fee will be applicable to the client (remaining funds less the full fee amounts of used services will be returned to the client).

**Cessation of Services**

These Terms and Conditions are effective unless and until terminated by either you or us. You may terminate these Terms and Conditions at any time by notifying us that you no longer wish to use our services.

If in our sole judgement you fail, or we suspect that you have failed, to comply with any term or provision of these Terms and Conditions, we also may terminate this agreement at any time without notice.

**Changes to Terms and Conditions**

You can review the most current version of the Terms and Conditions at any time on our website www.mindfullotuscounselling.com.au.

We reserve the right, at our sole discretion, to update, change or replace any part of these Terms and Conditions at any time by posting updates and changes to our website. It is your responsibility to check our website periodically for changes. Your continued use of our service or access to our website following the updating of any changes to these Terms and Conditions constitutes acceptance of those changes.

**Informed Consent to Counselling**

I have read the above information carefully and understand the conditions and policies stated. I had the opportunity to ask questions and had my questions answered. I accept the information provided and agree to the conditions for the provision of counselling services offered and provided at Mindful Lotus Counselling (MLC)