



## **Client Information Form and Informed Consent**

Welcome to Lethbridge Counselling Services (LCS)! This document is intended to provide you with information about receiving counselling services with LCS. Please review this information carefully and ask any questions you may have before you sign this consent. If you would like a copy of this form, let your Counsellor know.

### **Q. What are your qualifications?**

A. At Lethbridge Counselling Services, we are pleased to offer the services of Registered Psychologists, Registered Provisional Psychologists, Registered Social Workers and Canadian Certified Counsellors. All of our therapists are health professionals, trained at a master's level and are associated with a professional regulatory body.

### **Q. What kind of issues can therapy help with?**

A. Counselling is a process that focuses on wellness, personal growth, and addressing a variety of specific presenting concerns. The counsellor's role is to help you work in ways that respects your values, personal resources, and capacity for self-determination. Counselling can help with a number of issues. Your Counsellor can discuss with you their particular areas of practice and specialty, and you can let them know what kinds of support you are looking for.

### **Q. What are the risks and benefits of coming for therapy?**

A. There are numerous risks and benefits with coming to counselling. The way you act, feel and think are affected by coming to counselling. This may be positive or negative. Please discuss these further with your Counsellor and let them know if you have any specific questions or concerns.

### **Q. What are the responsibilities of the therapist in the counselling process?**

A. Your Counsellor is responsible for practicing ethically and in line with their own standards of practice for their profession.

### **Q. What are my responsibilities in coming to therapy?**

A. You, as a client seeking services with Lethbridge Counselling Services, are responsible for:

- Attending sessions as scheduled and letting your Counsellor know if you need to cancel or change an appointment. Please contact your Counsellor directly to advise of cancellations and rescheduling.
- Completing homework as discussed
- Being an active participant in the counselling process
- Not attending the LCS office if you are ill (symptoms consistent with COVID-19), if you are awaiting a COVID-19 test result, or if you have tested positive for COVID-19 in the previous 14 days).

**Q. Are there alternatives to counselling?**

A. There are many ways people may choose to deal with struggles in their life and counselling is definitely one option. Other options may be to talk to your doctor or see a natural health practitioner. Talking with friends and family may also be helpful.

Some presenting concerns, however, are best handled with professional assistance. Not dealing with personal issues can have consequences in the long-run including the problem potentially getting worse and negative impacts on your studies, relationships, or health.

**Q. How can I access services?**

A. Services are available in person at the LCS office or online via ZOOM (Encrypted Health Care version) to Alberta residents.

**Q. What do I need to know about virtual services?**

A. If you are accessing services virtually it requires that you have a basic level of comfort with and access to technology and are familiar with programs such as ZOOM and email. It also requires you to be comfortable with having only online / telephone access to a Counsellor, as you will not be meeting with them in-person.

Although research has shown that online counselling is generally not as effective as face-to-face counselling, it is certainly a good option for individuals who would not otherwise access counselling services (due to, for instance, living in an isolated area or having a schedule that would make it difficult to attend counselling at an office).

There are also risks associated with online counselling including pitfalls associated with technology. There may be unplanned service disruptions, lag time in online conversations, and delays in sending and receiving emails. There are also security risks always present with transmitting information online. It is your responsibility to be familiar with the terms of service for the technology being used.

Attending counselling over the computer or telephone is not for everyone. If it is felt that you would better benefit from another service, a referral may be made. Please note that if you are currently feeling suicidal or homicidal, e-counselling or telephone counselling is not an appropriate service for you. Please contact your local mental health clinic or hospital.

While every effort is made to ensure the safety and security of online counselling material (emails and live chats), vulnerabilities still exist. For instance, it is possible for third parties to intercept email sent between client and counsellor. It is also possible at times to misdirect your email message by failing to pay attention to the address of the person to whom you are writing.

We suggest the following guidelines for the use of email in online counselling:

- Use a personal or home computer - it is safer simply by virtue of the fact that far less people have access to it.
- Avoid sending/receiving emails at wireless (Wi-Fi) hotspots unless you are sure your connection is secure or you are prepared to take the risk.
- Make a point of double checking the 'To' address field prior to clicking 'Send'.
- You may wish to consider requesting a 'return receipt' so that your counsellor acknowledges your email upon receiving it.
- Use a password for access to your computer and email account and log out when you are finished.
- Ensure all security software (such as anti-virus and firewall applications) and system software updates are installed.
- You may also wish to consider encryption of your email.
- If receiving services via telephone, we ask that you call us at the number provided (vs. using calling you) – this reduces the risk of breaching your privacy if someone else answers the phone.

\*This section adapted from: <http://www.aut.ac.nz/being-a-student/current-postgraduates/your-health-and-wellbeing/counselling/online-counselling/online-counselling-benefits-and-risks>

### **Q. What is in my file?**

A. As soon as you fill out the client information form and sign this consent form, a file is created for you. You have the right to view your client file as long as it does not cause you, or anyone else harm to do so, or for other reasons as outlined by applicable laws. Your Counsellor must keep your file for a minimum of 10 years from the end of therapy, after which your file will be shredded. Depending on your situation your file may be retained longer. Please discuss this with your therapist if you have questions.

### **Q. How are files stored?**

A. Paper files are stored in a locked filing cabinet in the LCS main office. Your Counsellor is only one with regular access to your file. An extra key to each cabinet is stored in a locked cabinet in case of an emergency (i.e. your Counsellor is ill and unable to see you and another LCS staff needs to reach you to advise of this).

Due to COVID-19, your Counsellor may be working from home at times if providing virtual services. In this case, files are stored in a locked cabinet and are transported securely.

If your Counsellor is storing files electronically, then files are stored securely on an encrypted and password protected server and are accessed only by your Counsellor on their personal and

password protected device. Your Counsellor will advise of specific details of their file storage. Please be sure to ask if you have any questions.

### **Q. Can I be friends with my therapist?**

A. Your relationship with your Counsellor is a professional one guided by rules and ethics. As such, your therapist cannot:

- Have a business or personal friendship relationship with you
- Be your therapist if we are related
- Be your friend on Facebook or any other social media site
- Share their personal email
- Ever have any type of romantic or sexual relationship with you, or with any people close to you
- Be your supervisor, teacher or evaluator
- Receive gifts from you

### **Q. How private is my information?**

A. All information shared by you within sessions is confidential and generally will not be shared with anyone unless you give your Counsellor written permission to do so. Below are some exceptions to this.

Legally and ethically, your counsellor must breach your confidentiality if:

- You threaten to do harm or kill yourself or another person.
- They become aware that a minor (under age 18), a dependent adult, a person in care or other vulnerable person/animal has been harmed (past or present), or is in danger of being harmed.
- They receive a court order (subpoena) that makes it so we must release your information/or if the court requires me to testify at a court hearing.
- You have an open claim with the Worker's Compensation Board (WCB), and they request your records
- You are accessing services through an Employee Assistance Plan. In this case, your EAP may have access to information about you including: session dates, if you no-show or cancel with less than 24 hours' notice for an appointment, risk assessment information should you appear to pose a risk to yourself or another person, the nature of your presenting concern and your case disposition when services are complete.
- Please note that that there are times information will not be released even if you request it, if the Counsellor deems that doing so may cause harm to you or a third party.

To further protect your privacy, please be aware:

- Your Counsellor will not greet you outside of the Lethbridge Counselling Services office **unless you greet them first.**

\*Please note that Lethbridge Counselling Services Counsellors do share information internally for the purposes of peer consultation and supervision. Only non-identifying information is

shared, this is for the purposes of providing you with the best possible service during your time with us.

\*\*Also note that Counsellors at Lethbridge Counselling Services use a shared Outlook calendar system in order to manage bookings, so your name and contact information will be visible in the calendar. The other Counsellors on the team along with our Intake Volunteer(s) may see this information. All LCS staff and volunteers have signed an Oath of Confidentiality. Your Counsellor also maintains a mobile Outlook calendar. All Counsellor's mobile devices are password protected.

\*\*\* For billing purposes, Counsellors at Lethbridge Counselling Services use a program called Wave Accounting for bookkeeping and billing purposes. This is an internet based application with a secure login. Your name and email address will be stored in this program in order to create invoices for services. No other identifying information is put into this system. If your Counsellor is direct billing your benefits company for services, your benefits provider will have access to appointment dates and the amount billed.

**Q. How long does counselling take?**

A. The length of counselling (# of sessions) will vary depending on your individual issues and needs. This is something you will discuss with your Counsellor in discussing your goals for the therapy process.

**Q. Is counselling covered by my employee health plan?**

A. Many employee/student health plans with extended health benefits may cover all or a portion of counselling services. Each plan is different in terms of the amount of coverage, number of sessions, and qualifications required for the therapist. Check with your Health Benefits Plan Administrator if you are unsure.

**Q. How much does counselling cost?**

A. The cost per session for this service varies per therapist. Regular non-subsidized fees range between \$80 and \$175 per hour. Your fee will be discussed and set at your first appointment.

**Q. Can you direct bill for services?**

A. Many of our Counsellors do offer direct billing options through Blue Cross, ASEBP and TELUS e-claims. You can discuss with your therapist what options may be available to you at the time of your first appointment. Please note that it is your responsibility to ensure there is adequate coverage for services rendered. If you reach your maximum, or your benefits are exhausted, you are responsible for any amounts left owing.

**Q. What if I don't pay?**

A. If there is a balance owing for services due to a no-show, insurance non-payment, or other arrangements not honoured by you, your Counsellor reserves the right to contact your insurance company regarding coverage or to send your outstanding account to collections for payment. Non-payment may result in a disruption of services.

**Q. What hours do you have available for counselling appointments?**

A. Counsellors are available for day and evening appointments. Each Counsellor has their own specific schedule, so please inquire as to your Counsellor's specific availability.

**Q. How long is a counselling session?**

A. Counselling sessions are generally 50-55 minutes in length, unless previously arranged. Fees for longer sessions will be charged accordingly, and as discussed with your Counsellor.

**Q. What if I need to cancel an appointment?**

A. All cancellations must be made more than 24 hours in advance of the appointment whenever possible. Failure to cancel within 24 hours or not attending a scheduled appointment (without rescheduling or cancelling) may result in being billed for the missed session. If you are more than 15 minutes late for your scheduled appointment, this is counted as a missed appointment and again, you may be billed. Your Counsellor will be glad to meet with you for the remaining portion of your appointment if you wish.

**Q. What if I am in crisis?**

A. During business hours, please call 403-942-0452 or email [lethbridgecounselling@gmail.com](mailto:lethbridgecounselling@gmail.com) and your Counsellor may be able to arrange to see you for an emergency appointment. If you are in crisis (outside of business hours or if you are not able to reach your Counsellor), contact the Distress Line (403.327.7905), call 911, or attend the emergency room at the Chinook Regional Hospital. Please note that Lethbridge Counselling Services is not a crisis service and cannot guarantee availability of crisis support.

**Q. Do you provide child care?**

A. No, child care is not provided and children cannot be brought to sessions (with the exception of small infants).

**Q. What about safety?**

A. We ask that you do not attend sessions while under the influence of alcohol or drugs as this negatively impacts both your safety and the safety of your therapist. We also do not allow any aggressive or abusive behaviour directed towards other clients accessing services or towards the therapist (in office, on the phone or by email). LCS is meant to be safe space. If your therapist

feels threatened by any action (verbal or physical) made by you, you will be asked to leave and services may be discontinued.

**Q. What if I am not happy with my therapy experience?**

A. We encourage you to share your concerns with your Counsellor and we can see what we can do to make things better. You also have a right to request a referral to another therapist if you feel like your Counsellor is not the right fit for you.

If you feel that your Counsellor has acted unethically, you can choose to contact their professional association to file a complaint. Please note that if you choose to do so, your Counsellor will need to share important information about services provided to you as contained in your file.

**Q. How do I know when counselling is finished?**

A. Counselling can be discontinued at any time by either the client or the therapist. Ideally though it is joint decision when you as the client feel as though you have met the goals you set for yourself in counselling and no longer require the service.

**My Consent**

This consent is valid from the date it is signed and will expire at the termination of services after which the file will be closed.

You have the right to withdraw this consent at any time, without prejudice, during the course of service delivery. Should you wish to do so, please let your Counsellor know and this will be documented on your file and services will be discontinued.

**CLIENT:**

**I (WE) HAVE HAD THE CHANCE TO ASK QUESTIONS ABOUT THIS FORM \_\_\_\_\_ (initial)**

**A COPY OF THIS FORM HAS BEEN OFFERED TO ME (US) \_\_\_\_\_ (initial)**

**I UNDERSTAND WHAT THIS FORM SAYS, AND I HERBY PROVIDE MY INFORMED CONSENT FOR COUNSELLING:**

**Client Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**THERAPIST:**

**I HAVE DISCUSSED THIS INFORMED CONSENT WITH MY CLIENT \_\_\_\_ (initial)**

**In my professional opinion the above person appears to understand the information I have presented and there does not appear to be a reason why this person is not fully competent to give informed consent to participate in the therapy process.**

**Consent was:**        \_\_\_ Obtained    \_\_\_ Limited    \_\_\_ Refused

**Therapist Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_



DOB of the Insured Member: \_\_\_\_\_ (DD/MM/YY)

Limitations of Benefits Coverage (qualifications, amount):

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**How did you hear about us?**

Friend                      Doctor                      Another Counsellor                      Family Member

Internet Search                      Facebook                      Yellow Pages                      Other

**Anything else you would like us to know?**

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