



Therapeutic Counseling Program

WELCOME PACKET

Please read carefully and keep this packet at home for easy reference.

Our counseling program was created to serve a child or adult survivor of childhood adversities, who would not otherwise be afforded the benefits of therapeutic counseling. Based on your assessment with your counselor you will be provided with 8-10 counseling sessions **at no cost to you**. These sessions are 50 minutes long unless otherwise specified.

Our Counseling Program Goals:

- To provide a safe, caring, and compassionate environment with competent counselors trained in effective therapeutic interventions that assist and support children, adults, and families healing from childhood trauma and abuse.
- To provide support of victims through linking them to additional community resources as well as assist them with applying for victim compensation when appropriate.

ALL THERAPY SESSIONS TAKE PLACE AT:

Family Resource Center Annex
191 Jefferson Street in Clarkesville
On the campus of First Presbyterian Church

Phone: 706-778-3100 ext. 106
Email: referral@familyresourcecenterneg.org
Fax: 706-928-5183

Appointment Cancellation Policy:

Therapeutic Counseling is being provided to you at no charge and we expect you to place the same value on our services and our time by **not** cancelling appointments with your therapist at the last minute. If you find you must cancel your appointment, out of courtesy to our therapists and other clients on our wait list, please provide **24-hour notice of cancellation**. Our phone system allows you to leave a message of your need to cancel 24 hours a day. If our agency finds that you regularly miss your appointments or reschedule them at the last moment it may be in the best interest of all parties for us to exit you from our counseling program and refer you to other counseling agencies.

Contacting Your Therapist:

Our therapists offer their time for counseling at the Family Resource Center on specific days of the week, as each have private practices outside of their contracted work for our agency. For questions, rescheduling, or cancellations, please call 706-778-3100 ext. 106. Once you have met with your therapist, please use their cell number after your initial visit. Our counseling program is an outpatient practice and we can serve individuals who are reasonably safe and resourceful. Our therapists do not carry a beeper and are **NOT** available 24/7. If at any time this does not feel like sufficient support, please inform your therapist to discuss additional resources. Generally, our therapists will return phone calls within 48 hours during normal business office hours.

In Case of an Emergency:

If you need eminent and immediate help, please use the resource numbers listed below. Our counseling program is an outpatient practice and we are set up to serve individuals who are reasonably safe and resourceful. Our counselors do not have 24-hour availability and if at any time this does not feel like enough support, please inform your counselor. The two of you can discuss additional resources or transfer your case to a clinic with 24-hour availability. If you have a mental health emergency, we encourage you not to wait for your next appointment, but to call the emergency numbers listed below:

Emergency and Resource Numbers

- Call Laurelwood Hospital at 770-531-3800 or Peachford Hospital at 770-454-5589
- Call the Suicide Prevention Hotline at 1-800-273-8255
- Call the Youth America Hotline (teens counseling teens) at 1-877-968-8454
- Call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room
- **Call GCAL 1-800-715-4225 (for all mental health emergencies 24 hours a day)**

Technology:

Cell Phones & Texting: Text messaging may be used for appointment confirmation if consent is given on application. ***Please never send a text message to your counselor with dialogue that discusses your case.*** We cannot guarantee receipt of a text message and they cannot provide you with the privacy that you are entitled to as our client. However, when needing to re-schedule or to notify your therapist of any changes, always use their cell phone to leave a message, as our office staff are not always available and are not at the Center on weekends. Please make sure you and your child's therapist have shared your (cell) phone numbers with each other.

E-mail: Though our email server is HIPAA compliant it is important for you to know that there are still risks associated with emailing private and confidential information. Emails will become part of your clinical record. Do NOT communicate urgent needs via email.

Social Media: We do NOT communicate via any social media outlets with clients enrolled in our counseling program to ensure your privacy and confidentiality.

Technology is continuously changing and evolving and new ways of communicating emerge frequently. Please direct any questions or concerns you may have with your therapist for further clarification.

PATIENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The HIPAA Notice of Privacy Practices can be found in the FRC Annex office, in both client waiting areas and on our website: frcofneg.org. Copies are available upon request.

The Family Resource Center's staff and therapists have a legal and ethical obligation to protect your confidentiality and privacy. Certain limited exceptions apply under the law, such as when there is sufficient cause to believe that you pose a threat of physical harm to yourself or others. The Family Resource Center's staff and therapists are also required by law to report any form of child neglect or abuse.

Confidentiality, Limits of Confidentiality & Records:

The Family Resource Center takes great care to ensure that your Protected Health Information (PHI) is kept strictly confidential at all times in compliance with the law. Please note, however, that if a therapist determines that you are a danger to yourself or others or you report information about the abuse of a child, an elderly person, or a disabled individual who may require protection, the therapist will have a duty to report such information.

Policy for Responding to Subpoenas and Court Orders:

The Family Resource Center keeps all client records confidential and shall not produce client records except when legally required and authorized to do so. The Family Resource Center's Executive Director shall serve as the "custodian of records" for all organizational and client records.

Unless otherwise required by law, the Family Resource Center will not release the records of any client without a written release that complies with the requirements of the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) and applicable state law from the client or his or her personal representative. Reasonable fees for administrative expenses and copying charges will be assessed for all requests for documents.

No records shall be released to a third party without the express approval of the Executive Director, who is responsible for maintaining control over all organizational and client records. Any employee who receives a subpoena or court order for information or documents relating to a client must immediately notify the Executive Director.

Professional Relationship:

Psychotherapy is a professional service your therapist will provide to you. Because of the nature of therapy, your relationship with him/her must be different from most relationships. It may differ in how long it lasts, the objectives, or the topics discussed. It must also be limited to only the relationship of therapist and client. If you and your counselor were to interact in any other ways, you would then have a "dual relationship," which could prove to be harmful to you overall and is, therefore, unethical in the mental health profession. Dual relationships can set up conflicts between the therapist's interests and the client's interests, and then the client's (your) interests might not be put first. To offer all our clients the best care, the therapist's judgment needs to be unselfish and purely focused on your needs. Therefore, your relationship with our therapists must remain professional in nature.

Additionally, there are important differences between therapy and friendship. Friends may see your position only from their personal viewpoints and experiences. Friends may want to find quick and easy solutions to your problems so that they can feel helpful. These short-term solutions may not be in your long-term best interest. Friends may also need to have you do what they advise. A therapist offers you objective choices and empowers you choose what is best for you. A therapist helps you learn how to

solve problems better and make better decisions. A therapist's responses to your situation are based on tested theories and methods of change.

Therapists are required to keep the identity of their clients a secret. As much as our therapists would like to, he/she will not address you in public unless you speak to him/her first. They also must decline any invitation to attend gatherings with your family or friends, or to accept "friend" requests on Facebook or any other social media. Lastly, when your therapy is completed, he/she will not be able to be a friend to you like your other friends, as you may want counseling from him/her sometime in the future. In sum, it is our counselor's duty to always maintain a professional role. Please note that these guidelines are not meant to be impolite in any way; they are strictly for your long-term protection.

Respect and Non-Discrimination:

All agency services are available regardless of actual or perceived age, race, color, religion, national origin, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, residency status, or disability. Discrimination and harassment of any kind based on age, race, color, religion, national origin, sex gender identity, sexual orientation, residency status or disability is strictly prohibited by the Family Resource Center. If you believe you have been harassed or subject to discriminatory treatment because of race, color, national origin, sex, age, religion, or disability, or have been retaliated against for engaging in protected activity, you have the right to file a complaint to the Civil Rights Officer of the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) at (404) 657-1956 104 or 104 Marietta St, Suite 440 Atlanta, GA 30303. Generally, formal complaints must be filed with the Civil Rights Officer within 180 calendar days of the alleged act of discrimination. If the complaint is not filed on time, the complainant should provide the reason for the delay and request a waiver of this filing requirement. The CJCC will decide whether to grant the waiver. The complaint may be filed in a letter, in an email, in person, or over the phone. In anticipation of filing a complaint, an individual may find it beneficial to contact the Civil Rights Officer to obtain policy clarification, advice, or assistance.

Telephone Consultations:

Occasionally, you or your therapist will need to speak by phone. For these necessary and brief consultations, there is no charge; however, if you desire further assistance, we can schedule an earlier office appointment.

Child Care:

The Family Resource Center does not provide childcare and is not responsible for children or adolescents left unsupervised in the waiting room. Minors must be picked up following their appointments on time. If you must leave your child in the waiting room during a session, it is your responsibility to provide appropriate supervision for that child. Children under the age of 10 may not be left without supervision in our waiting rooms.

Additional Rights and Responsibilities:

In addition to your right to confidentiality, you have the right to end your counseling at any time, for whatever reason. You also have the right to question any aspect of your treatment with your therapist.

The Family Resource Center likewise reserves the right to discontinue counseling at any time and for any reason, including, but not limited to, a violation by you of the expectations presented in this Client Welcome Packet, a change or reevaluation by your counselor of your therapeutic needs, our agency's ability to address those needs, or other circumstances that lead the FRC to conclude in its sole and absolute discretion that your counseling needs would be better served at another counseling facility. Under such circumstances, the FRC will suggest an appropriate therapist or counseling agency.

PARENT INFORMATION AND AGREEMENT

The Family Resource Center (the "Center") requires all parents and/or guardians to agree to the terms of the **Parent Agreement for Child Counseling Services** for a child to receive therapy services. Obtaining such agreement is important for providing safe and confidential treatment to the child. Information regarding a child's therapist's role is provided below.

Please ask a Family Resource Center staff member any questions you may have before signing the **Parent Agreement for Child Counseling Services** form included in the **Intake Information** paperwork.

Counselor's Role as Child/Adolescent Therapist:

Children benefit from having a place and a space to work through their emotions about their parents' divorce. Often, young children do not have the words to express what they are feeling but the feelings can be played out and worked through in play therapy. Older children benefit from talking about the divorce and gaining support and insight from the counseling relationship. This professional relationship provides a safe and confidential space for children to express and work through their emotions and feelings. Parents may be provided parenting recommendations as part of the therapy.

Because of the importance of the therapist's relationship with the child, by accepting services through the Family Resource Center, you agree not to request that the child's therapist testify in court for any purpose. It is not in the child's best interest for a therapist to testify in court. Requiring a therapist to testify in court destroys the therapeutic relationship, conflicts with a therapist's ethical obligations, and may cause the child to feel betrayed. By accepting services through the Family Resource Center, you further agree not to request the child's medical records for any litigation purpose.

In any case in which a therapist or other Family Resource Center Staff member is subpoenaed to appear in court in violation of the Agreement to Receive Services, all associated time will be billed to the person who issued the subpoena or caused it to be issued at a rate of \$400.00 per hour. The rate of \$400.00 per hour will be charged for all activities related to the subpoena, including but not limited to communicating with lawyers or the guardian ad litem, traveling to/from the courthouse, waiting at the courthouse, and reviewing notes.

Reporting of Suspected Child Abuse:

Child therapists must report suspected or disclosed abuse to proper authorities, which may lead to a forensic investigation/interview. However, child therapists do not issue any opinion on whether abuse has occurred.

Custody Determinations:

When necessary, therapists may provide a summary report of a child's treatment to a guardian ad litem ("GAL") or the Custody Evaluator, but therapists **never** provide any opinion regarding custody determinations. If a custody determination is needed, the Center can provide a referral to an appropriate, licensed professional.