

## **Informed Consent for Telecounselling**

Purpose: For you to understand the process, nature, risks, and benefits of counselling in order to make an informed decision about participating in counselling.

Counselling Services at the University of Lethbridge is pleased to offer services to Calgary Campus students through distance delivery ("telecounselling") – either via videoconferencing or telephone. The platform that we are using is Zoom. Zoom is a third-party video communication service that uses industry standard privacy and security measures. For additional information regarding their privacy standards and tips on privacy, visit the following link: <https://zoom.us/privacy>

## **Welcome to Counselling and Career Services!**

Congratulations! Deciding to make an appointment with counselling isn't always an easy step for students. Engaging in counselling takes courage and provides you with the opportunity to discover much about yourself. This may be your first experience with counselling, and we believe it is important to be clear and transparent about what counselling is, and what counselling looks like at the University of Lethbridge Counselling Services. Please read through this form carefully and bring up any questions that you have so that we can discuss them.

You will be asked to review and complete an information form and a counselling consent form.

## **Your First Appointment**

During your first appointment your counsellor will discuss the initial consent form with you. This provides you the opportunity to ask questions or express any concerns you might have. The remainder of the session is spent gathering information about your presenting concerns(s) and/or need(s) and exploring expectations of your work together. Counselling appointments are 50 minutes in length.

**Please note:** if you are more than 15 minutes late for your appointment, your session will be cancelled and you will have the opportunity to reschedule.

## **About Counselling: Some Risks and Benefits**

Counselling is different than talking to a friend or family member. Our conversations have a specific purpose or intention, and sometimes this may challenge your beliefs or perceptions. You might feel annoyed, tired or upset following a session. This can happen as you are processing new ways of thinking or because you've spoken about something that's upsetting to you. As a result of counselling, you may experience changes in your relationships or beliefs that have unexpected results. Usually these changes are very positive in the long-term, but it may be difficult to experience as they are occurring.

Your counsellor may suggest trying specific techniques in counselling (e.g., relaxation exercises). If you have any questions about these techniques it's important you ask. It's also important to know you have the right to stop any exercise at any time during the session. Counselling is one form of support for client problems – other forms may include medications, physical activity (e.g., yoga, art etc.) We invite you to ask your counsellor for referral information.

## **Telecounselling Risks**

While engaging in telecounselling has benefits, there are some additional risks as outlined below:

- There are therapeutic limitations to online services. For example, there is the potential for misunderstandings when two people are not in the same room;
- Technology limitations may impact services (e.g., time delays, equipment failure);
- While efforts will be made to protect privacy, information transmitted via the internet may not be secure (e.g., hackers);
- Additional information will need to be gathered to ensure your safety. This includes, emergency contacts and your exact location during sessions;
- Appropriateness of online services to meet your needs will be routinely reviewed. It may be determined that in-person services are better suited to your specific needs. In this case, a referral will be made to a local agency and a transition plan will be made between you and your counsellor. A fee or wait time may be associated with referrals.

## The Relationship with the Counsellor

The relationship you have with your counsellor is different than other relationships. You will be sharing important details with your counsellor, but you will know little about them. This can be difficult sometimes, but as a professional, your counsellor is part of an association that has rules about the types of interactions they are allowed to have with clients.

As part of these rules your counsellor:

- Cannot have any other kind of business relationship with you.
- Cannot be your therapist if they are related to you or if they are your friend.
- Cannot give other types of professional advice (legal, medical, financial, etc.)
- Cannot have any kind of romantic, friendship, or sexual relationship with a former or current client, or with any people close to a client.
- Cannot give or receive gifts from clients except tokens with personal meaning to the therapy process.
- Cannot be your supervisor, teacher, or evaluator while engaged in counselling with you.
- Cannot attend personal parties/events of clients even if you invite them.

Because your counsellor is very concerned about protecting your confidentiality, your counsellor will not approach or acknowledge you if s/he/they sees you in the hallway or in the community. This is not meant to be rude, but rather to protect your privacy. Boundaries around any potential dual relationships will be discussed and managed with your counsellor.

When you have a counsellor, it's important you feel safe with this person. Sometimes, even though counsellors might be a great fit for a friend, they may not be a good fit for you. If you realize you're not comfortable with your counsellor, you have the right to request a referral.

Likewise, counsellors have the right to feel safe in their work, and also can ask that your care be transferred. This can occur if counsellors become aware of a conflict of interest, or if their personal experiences or skill-set will interfere with their ability to provide you with the best care possible.

As you and your counsellor have the right to feel safe, it is asked that you do not attend sessions while under the influence of drugs or alcohol. This enhances individual safety, while ensuring your participation and disclosures in counselling are voluntary and deliberate. If it becomes apparent that your judgment is impacted by drugs or alcohol, your counsellor may end the current session and reschedule.

## Counselling & Confidentiality

We protect your privacy: We are not allowed to tell people if, or why, you are seeking our services (e.g., we cannot talk to your family members or university staff about you) without your consent. However, there are times when the counsellor and/or the counselling team may not be able to protect your privacy as identified below.

Important Limits to Confidentiality:

- A. You give us written permission** to share details about you to others (e.g., an academic advisor, your doctor). You have the right to change your mind and revoke that permission at any time.
- B. We use non-identifying facts** about you (e.g., demographics) to compile statistics that may be used in professional publications and/or presentations.
- C. Your counselling file is subpoenaed.** We may advocate limiting the information admissible, but the court system has the ultimate right to access your file.
- D. You take legal action** against someone on the counselling team. Our staff may then need to access information you shared while accessing our services to handle your complaint.
- E. You share information** that implies; (a) you are in imminent danger of harming yourself or someone else; (b) someone you know may be in danger (e.g., is being abused, threatened, neglected, or is witnessing abuse) such as a university employee or student, dependent adult, family member, person under the age of 18, and/or animal; (c) there are criminal activities (past or current) that pose a risk to the safety of people; (d) there is maltreatment of a client by a helping professional.

**F. We receive information** from a concerned third party (such as security or a friend), or on social media that implies you may be at risk for engaging in behaviors that may threaten your or others' safety (e.g., made threats to a professor, or brought a weapon onto campus). In such cases, we may need to discuss these concerns with relevant parties (e.g., Security and/or members of the U of L Behavioural Intervention Committee). It is important you know our counselling team is very cautious about releasing information about you to others so only the minimal amount of information will be released and recorded in your counselling file. Based on clinical judgment the counsellor may choose not to inform you about information received from third parties.

*If you have any questions about these exceptions to your privacy, please ask us — we are devoted to protecting your rights.*

### **Release of Information Forms**

Should you or your counsellor wish to discuss your situation with another individual or agency, you will need to complete a release of information form stating who they are allowed to speak with and the type of information they can release. Please know that other units and health centres may not be bound by the same confidentiality rules as Counselling Services.

If your counsellor is writing a letter on your behalf, you will have an opportunity to review the letter and may request a copy for your own records. Often you will be expected to take the letter to the other party yourself, as opposed to faxing or mailing options. If you are picking up the documents at our reception desk, you will be required to show ID.

### **Mature Minor**

If you are under the age of 18, the law states that your legal guardian(s) may have the right to be informed of the contents of your client file. In this case, your counsellor will take additional steps to protect your privacy. In some cases, your counsellor will be able to determine that you are a mature minor, which means that you will not need consent from your legal guardian(s) to receive therapy. The counsellor will determine your mature minor status based on your understanding of the nature of therapeutic treatment, the risks and benefits to therapy, and your ability to apply your own values when you make decisions. If you are not a mature minor then your counsellor will ask you to get a signature from your legal guardian(s) before your next scheduled session.

### **Communication**

Should we need to contact you, we will try to reach you via the telephone number you've provided to us on the intake form. If our receptionist is phoning you, the number will come up as blocked on your phone. If your counsellor is contacting you from their direct line, their name and extension number may appear on your phone. We may communicate via email for the purpose of rescheduling or sharing resources/referrals. Please be aware that email is not completely confidential. Any email sent or received by your counsellor will be added to your file, so discretion is advised. Email is not a recommended method for indicating emergent concerns; emails are checked only during hours the counsellor is scheduled to be in the office. **If you are experiencing an emergency, please contact the Crisis Line at 403-327-7905.** University of Lethbridge Counselling Services does not participate in email or online counselling.

### **Consultation & Supervision**

To ensure the best service to you, your counsellor engages in consultation and/or supervision. This means that your counsellor may share details of your situation with other counsellors at U of L Counselling Services. Information is shared to help others learn, or to get feedback on what your counsellor may want to do differently in the sessions. These discussions are focused on helping to improve the quality of work your counsellor does, and only the details relevant to a particular aspect of your care will be discussed.

Your counsellor may access consultation from trained professionals in the community. The names of external consultants are available upon request and are recorded in your file. When participating in of-site consultation, your counsellor will not share your name or other identifying information in order to protect your confidentiality.

Your counsellor may engage in supervision to fulfill registration or competency requirements. If your counsellor receives supervision, she/he/they will have a separate form providing information about this process. You may be asked if one of your sessions can be recorded (audio/video). These recordings will not be taken of Counselling Services premises. They will not be kept as part of your counselling file, and will be destroyed after 21 days. They will be kept in a locked filing cabinet accessed only by your counsellor and the agency director when not in use. A supervisor or student may also observe a session by sitting in the room. You have the right to stop the recording or the observation at any time during the session, and you have a right to refuse observation or recording of your counselling work. Observation and recording will only occur if you sign the "Consent for Observation/Recording" form.

### **Your File**

Counselling Services utilizes an electronic record system called Titanium Schedule designed specifically for post-secondary counselling centres. This system is stored on a designated secure internal server accessible only on office computers of staff at University of Lethbridge Counselling Services. Computers are locked in offices and are password protected.

When you complete the intake documents, a file will be created on Titanium. Your file may include:

- Your intake forms
- All consent forms
- Reports written or received (e.g., psychiatric)
- Between session communications (e.g., emails, phone conversations)
- Copies of any letters written on your behalf
- Session notes
- Consultation/supervision notes
- Case file from previous counselling contact if you are a returning client. Please note, if you are a returning client, your former file will continue to exist as outlined in your previous informed consent document.

*You have access to your file and may request it at any time. It is important to note that up to 30 days are required for copying files.*

### **Who Can Access Your Information and How it is Stored**

Titanium is an electronic shared filing system. All client files are stored in the Titanium database. All counsellors have access to all client files. Administrative support staff have access to initial documents completed upon entry into counselling, but cannot access details about your sessions. Our administrative assistants are bound by an oath of confidentiality and never have the right to release your information to anyone other than the counsellors within the agency. Information Technology (IT) has access to the server but does not have access to specific client information. Our filing policy is as follows:

### **How Your Information is Stored**

- All files are stored electronically in Titanium.
- If you are a returning client your former paper file will either continue to be locked in a filing cabinet, or be scanned into Titanium.
- Your file will be closed when you and your counsellor complete services, or if we have not heard from you after 30 days.
- Files will be destroyed or deleted no sooner than 10 years after the date of last service.

### **Fees and Access to Services**

There are no fees for counselling. Counselling is available only to currently registered U of L students. To meet the demands of our student body, we generally offer students brief counselling. In consultation with their counsellor, students who require more long-term counselling are generally referred to an outside community agency.

## **Complaint Procedure**

If you have a concern about your counselling session or believe that your counsellor has behaved unethically, you can contact Jennifer Ellis-Toddington, Manager of Counselling Services at (403) 317-2845.

You may also contact your counsellor's professional association to file a complaint. Your counsellor should inform you of their professional association during your first meeting and should have their credentials on display in their office. The contact numbers for the professional associations to which the counsellors at the U of L belong are:

- College of Alberta Psychologists (780-424-5070)
- Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (613-237-1099)
- Alberta College of Social Workers (780-421-1167)

## **Client Consent to Counselling**

- I have read this Informed Consent document. (I understand that I will be able to ask my counsellor questions for clarification.)
- I have been given an electronic copy of this consent form and a list of Calgary community & emergency resources.
- I will do my best to attend scheduled appointments even if I do not always feel like it. If I cannot attend an appointment, I will contact my counsellor prior to the appointment to cancel or reschedule. If I am more than 15 minutes late for an appointment, I understand it will be cancelled and rescheduled.
- I agree to engage in counselling under the conditions outlined in this document

**Sign Here**

## **Emergency Contacts**

Emergencies (Fire/ Police/Ambulance)

911

## **Sheldon Chumir Health Centre**

Emergency Health Centre

*Closest 24/7 health care facility to Bow Valley College*

(<https://www.albertahealthservices.ca/findhealth/facility.aspx?id=1018406>)

1213 4 street, SW, Calgary

403-955.6200

Calgary Police Service

403-266-1234

Distress Line of Calgary (24/7)

403-266-4357

Suicide Prevention Helpline (24/7)

1-800-784-2433

YWCA Crisis Line (24/7)

403 266 0707

24-Hour Sexual Assault Crisis Line

1-780-423-4121

Calgary Drop-in & Rehab Center

403-266-3600

## **Free/Sliding Scale Counselling**

Alberta Health Services

Addiction & Mental Health

403-381-5260

Carya Family Services

403-205-5244

Eastside Family Counselling Services

403-299-9696

Calgary Counselling Centre

403-651-5991

## **Community Support Agencies**

Immigrant Services Calgary

403-265-1120

Calgary Sexual Health Centre

403-283-5580

Alberta Health Link

([myalbertahealth.ca](http://myalbertahealth.ca))

1-866-408-5465