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Counselling Agreement

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Please take the time to read this counselling agreement fully before you start your sessions. It contains important information about confidentiality, your data protection rights, what to do in an emergency and many other things that are important for you and your parent/carer to know before starting your counselling.

The way I work

I’m a counsellor and I specialise in supporting children like you to explore their feelings. I work online and over the phone. I use sand tray apps and games to support you to express yourself and explore things that are worrying or upsetting you. Counselling can sometimes be hard work because it involves looking deeply at things that can feel painful. Therefore, you may feel worse before you feel better. My job isn’t to offer you advice, instead I work alongside you, listen to you, and try to create a supportive, non-judgmental space for you to show me what’s going on in your world. This can help you to find your voice and to make positive changes in your life.

About me

I started my counselling career at ChildLine in 2009. I qualified as a social worker at Master’s level with the Tavistock Clinic in 2012 with a focus on child and adolescent mental health, working with children, young people, parents and families. I then gained a post-graduate qualification as a counsellor and psychotherapist in 2015. I have worked as a counsellor in schools, a women’s centre, and a young people’s counselling service. I now work in private practice with children, young people and parents. I also have a certificate in online and telephone counselling accredited by ACTO (Association of Counselling and Therapy Online) meaning that I meet the BACP (British Association of Counsellors and Psychotherapists) core competences that practitioners need to have to work online and over the phone with clients.

Timing, Frequency and Duration

* We will usually agree to meet weekly for 50 minutes per session.
* The counselling is open-ended, which means that there is no fixed end point. I regularly review the work with you to check in with how you are feeling about the sessions.

Rates and Payment (for parent/carer)

* I will issue you an invoice and payment is due via BACS 24 hours before a session or 24 hours in advance of the first session if block booking a number of sessions. Some clients prefer to set up a standing order for a weekly payment. If you chose to set up a regular weekly payment, please ensure it will enter my account 24 hours in advance of the session. I will refund the payment for any sessions that are cancelled with 24 hours notice and any sessions that are missed due to holidays etc. You can cancel the regular payment at any time.
* Parent intake meetings last 50 mins and are charged at my standard hourly rate.
* I do not usually write reports or letters, but upon request, with the consent of your child and if I deem it appropriate, I can write letters/reports to other professionals. I charge the full session rate for each 50mins it takes to write the letter/report.
* All scheduled and unscheduled communications with parents/other professionals (via phone/email/text/online) are charged as follows:
* 5mins-30mins – half the 50 min session rate
* 30mins-50mins – full 50 min session rate

Working online or via telephone

* You have the option of having your sessions over the telephone or online. You might prefer to have your camera off, but I encourage, where possible, for you to have your camera on so that I can see your facial expressions and body language.
* Whether the session is via phone or online, it is important that a parent with parental responsibility (or pre-assigned adult) is present at the start of the session to ensure that I am on the call.
* If, during a session, the internet is not working at either end then we may need to use the phone instead for that session.
* It is incredibly important that you have an undisturbed and private space for you to have your counselling sessions. This is so that you don’t feel like you are being overheard. You may like to consider making a ‘Do not disturb’ sign for the door.



* You may also like to ask your family to think about where they are based in the house during your sessions to ensure they can’t overhear you.
* It is important that you wear headphones during the session.



* At my end, I ensure that I am also in an undisturbed, private space and I wear headphones.
* If the call should be broken off, I shall attempt to reconnect with you online or by calling the phone number/s that I have been given.
* It is important that the person responsible for you during your session is available to answer the phone during the session should we have connection problems or in the case of an emergency.
* When working via video, I ask that you wear clothes that you would wear if you were at a face-to-face appointment.
* I ask that you do not eat during sessions as it makes it hard for you to communicate.
* I will not conduct sessions if I believe that you, or the person responsible for you during the session, are under the influence of alcohol or illegal substances.
* It is important that the space in which you are having counselling is free from distractions (phone on silent, not checking emails etc).
* You may want to have a clearly marked folder on the device you use for counselling to save work and images you create during your sessions. It is important that this folder is treated as confidential and is not looked at by anyone other than yourself without your permission.
* It is important that any listening devices such as Alexa are switched off during your sessions.



* I ask that you only use the apps that I provide you for your sessions and that you do not use the internet in other ways during the sessions (i.e. checking emails, searching for something on google or YouTube) as I cannot be held accountable for the content that you come across.
* Please ensure the device are using for your session is fully charged or plugged in.
* You may find it helpful to have a physical mouse if you are using a computer/tablet for your counselling sessions as inbuilt tracker pads can be harder to use when using some of the apps we might use in sessions.



* I ask that you do not share images, videos, links or messages with me from your phone or other device (during a session or another way such as via text or email). This is because it might not be appropriate for you to share it with me or you might share other images, videos or messages with me by mistake. If you would like to share an image, video, link or message with me then we can discuss how we could do that safely.
* There are times when working online and via telephone is not appropriate. I shall continually assess if working in this way is appropriate for you and, if at any point, it becomes inappropriate we shall work towards an ending and I can support you to find an alternative counsellor.

Working online (for parents/carers)

* I recommend that, if your child is not using their own device for their sessions, that you create a unique user/account for your child on the device. This is so that your own data can be protected during the session. For example, I cannot be held accountable for your child reading your emails during the sessions and I also may at times ask your child to screen share from the device so that I can see what they are doing in a particular therapeutic app. I also advise that once you have got the zoom link for the session from your email account you then close your email account and ensure that the password is not saved in that user/account.
* I also advise that your child’s email account and other private accounts, documents and images etc are closed during the session so they cannot be shared accidently during the session.
* It is important for your child to have a clearly marked folder on the device to save work and images they create during their sessions. It is important that this folder is treated as confidential and is not looked at by anyone other than the child without their permission.
* You may also want to consider what parental controls you have in place on the device your child is using for their counselling.

Confidentiality and Record Keeping

* It is really important that what you say and do in your sessions is confidential. This means that I will not be telling anyone about what you say or do in your sessions (not even to your parent/s).
* The only time that I will need to talk to someone else about what you may have said or done in a session is if I am worried about you or someone else coming to some harm. Then I may need to tell people in order to make sure you are safe.
* Very rarely, counsellors are required by the Court of Law to speak in court or give them their notes.
* All counsellors need to receive regular supervision in which we discuss our client work. During my supervision I do not share information that would identify you such as your name and where you live.
* It is not permissible (for either you or anyone else) to record or publicise the content of your sessions or share them with anyone else.
* On the rare occasion I may wish to speak to another professional about your circumstances I would try to discuss this with you first. This may include situations where:
* You are in danger of seriously harming yourself or another.
* You report current or recent child abuse.
* I have concerns that a child or children may be at risk of significant harm, i.e. physical, sexual or emotional abuse, neglect or in danger.
* I am required to do so by a subpoena.
* You infer involvement in or knowledge of an act of terrorism, money laundering or drugs trafficking.
* If I think, feel or suspect you or someone else is at risk then I have a duty of care to report it.
* In the event of my death or severe illness my supervisor will have access to my client data so that they can contact you to let you know of the circumstances and to support you to find another counsellor if you should wish to.

Parental Responsibility and giving permission for counselling (for parents/carers)

* I will only work with a child if I have been given permission to do so by all parents/carers with parental responsibility for the child.
* If one parent/carer withdraws their consent, I will no longer be able to work with the child. Please bear in mind that the ending of a child’s counselling is process that needs to be given some time and thought and, ideally, should not happen suddenly. I recommend that 4 weeks notice is given.

Communication

* Practical arrangements about appointments can be made via text/whatsapp messages and emails. However, if there needs to be personal information (i.e. anything other than practical arrangements about sessions) shared in written form, then I can send you an email via a service called Frama so you can reply using their end-to-end encryption service.
* In order to protect my therapeutic relationship with the children I work with, I ask parents to include their child in all communication exchanges and consultations with me (after the initial parent intake meeting). This is because you need to be at the centre of the therapeutic work, you need to hear what is said between your parent/s and your counsellor and be confident that your confidentiality is being respected.

Communication (for parents/carers)

* When your child is receiving counselling, you may have questions and concerns about the counselling. You might have information that you feel could be useful for the counselling. You are also bound to be curious about how the work is going and whether your child is bringing up the things you feel they need to work on. Collaboration between parents and counsellor is a vital part of a child’s counselling. But, in almost every situation, including your child in any conversations you have with me, and any emails or texts you send me, is going to be best for your child. I ask all parents to consider this before communicating with me. There has been an excellent article written about this by a therapist based in the US which I highly recommend reading before your child starts their sessions with me: <https://mccounselingcenter.com/2020/07/31/confidentiality-with-your-teens-therapists/>
* If parents are separated, we shall arrange between us how you would like me to communicate with you both. You may prefer that all communication is always sent to both of you. We will also need to agree how and when the other parent is informed when one of you contacts me via phone (there is a section at the end of this counselling agreement where you can indicate your communication preferences).

Holidays

* I generally take holidays over Easter, Summer and Christmas and half terms. I shall give you advanced notice of these holidays.
* I ask that you give me as much notice of your holidays as possible.

Cancellations and early endings of sessions

If for any reason you have to cancel an appointment, please contact me as soon as possible. If less than 24 hours notice of cancellation is given, then you will be charged the full rate. If I have to cancel our session, I will try to give you as much notice as possible and no fee will be charged. If I feel that it is not possible to work safely with you during a session (e.g. due to lack of privacy at the client’s end), I will end the sessions and notify you and your parent/carer why I have needed to do so. If I need to end a session for this reason, then the full fee will be payable.

Late attendance

Unless prearranged, if you are late for your session, I will not be able to extend the session. If, after 10mins you are not online/answering the phone I shall end the call.

Non-attendance

If you fail to attend appointments without notifying me, I will assume that you no longer wish to continue counselling and the appointment will be freed for someone else. If I am concerned about you, I shall attempt to contact you. If I cannot get hold of you, I may contact your emergency contact to check that you are ok.

Reviews and endings

* We shall review our work together regularly.
* If you feel the time is right to end your sessions, please let me know so we can work together towards a suitable ending.
* Where possible, 4 weeks notice of ending should be given by either you or myself.

Emergencies

* I cannot provide an emergency service for clients.
* If you are considering self-harm or suicide it would be vital to get immediate help. This could include telling your parents or another trusted adult, contacting your GP, calling an ambulance, or going to your nearest accident and emergency service (A&E).
* You could also call the Samaritans on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org (email emergency support) or, if you are under 19 years of age, ChildLine can be contacted on 0800 1111 and via their website: <https://www.childline.org.uk/get-support/contacting-childline/>



Jurisdiction

I currently only work with clients based in the UK (England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland). If you go on holiday or move outside of the UK please let me know so that I can check with my insurers if it is possible to work with you whilst you are based abroad, and also to assess whether it would be appropriate to work with you whilst you are based abroad.

Data protection

I am registered with the ICO (Information Commissioner’s Office) and I take protecting your data very seriously. My data protection policy can be accessed via my website: <https://www.elliefinch.co.uk/policies>

* Any notes taken during or after the session do not identify the client by name and are kept for 6 years. All client details are kept securely. I password protect my computer and store files in an encrypted folder. Any paperwork is kept in a locked cabinet.
* I use a secure emailing system called RMail to send and receive sensitive data from you such as your address and GP details. If you have sensitive information (such as this completed counselling agreement) to share with me via email I will send you an invitation to send it to me via Rmail (rather than my usual email address).
* You have a right to access the personal data on you that I hold (see data protection policy for further information).
* I shall share with you the privacy and data protection policies of the platforms/software we use for communication and online therapy so that you understand your rights as a data subject and know the process of data protection for the purposes of online counselling.

Social Media Policy

To protect our professional working relationship, keep the boundaries between us clear and preserve confidentiality, I do not befriend past or current clients (parent or child) and will not respond to client invitations from social media such as Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn. Similarly, I will not respond to comments from clients on profiles/entries/blogs/remarks of mine on social media sites. I will also not respond to any direct messages via social media sites and recommend that you do not use these sites to communicate with me.

Registration and Complaints

I am a registered member of the BACP (British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy) and am bound by its code of ethics.

If you have any complaints or concerns about my practice please do talk to me if you can, and you can also contact the BACP via their website.



Insurance

I hold public liability insurance with the Psychologists Protection Society.



Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Certificate

I have an up-to-date Enhanced DBS certificate stating that I have no criminal record. I subscribe to the DBS update service so you can check my DBS status at any time. Upon request, I am happy to send you details of how to access the DBS update service.

Disclaimer

Whilst all reasonable steps are taken to protect client data, digital services (including and not limited to phone, email and web-conferencing) supplied by third party providers are not wholly within the therapist’s control. The therapist cannot be held liable, responsible or accountable for data breaches attributable to third party providers.

Tech support disclaimer

Occasionally, I might offer some basic tech support to you or your parent/carer in order to assist you in setting up apps and your device so you can receive your counselling. Any advice I give you and your parent/carer is advice based on my lay person knowledge. I’m not a tech advisor and I can’t guarantee that the advice given will always be completely accurate. My partner is a computer programmer and I occasionally ask him for technical support that I pass on to my clients. When I discuss with my partner a particular technical issue a family may be having, I fully anonymise the family.

Emergency Contact

* It is important that you provide me with an emergency contact so that if, for example, anything should happen to your child whilst they are having a session, I can make sure the get the support they need.
* Please ensure that the emergency contact knows that I am your child’s counsellor and that I will only contact them in an emergency.
* I will not disclose unnecessary information to this person, only what they need to know to support your child.

Disclaimer for External Links

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