



Informed Consent for Technology Assisted Counseling/Online Counseling

Process:

Possible misunderstandings: The client should be aware that misunderstandings are possible with telephone, text-based modalities such as email, and real-time internet chat, since nonverbal cues are relatively lacking. Even with video chat software, misunderstandings may occur, since bandwidth is always limited and images lack detail. Counselors are observers of human behavior and gather much information from body language, vocal inflection, eye contact, and other non-verbal cues. If you have never engaged in online counseling before, have patience with the process and clarify information if you think your counselor has not understood you well. Be patient if your counselor asks periodically for clarification as well.

Turnaround time: Using asynchronous (not in "real time") communication such as email entails a "lag" of response. Michael Noll Counseling, LLC (MNC) will make every effort to respond to email requests within a 12 to 24 hour period.

Privacy of Michael Noll Counseling, LLC: Although the internet provides the appearance of anonymity and privacy in counseling, privacy is more of an issue online than in person. The client is responsible for securing their own computer hardware, internet access points, chat software, email and passwords.

MNC has a right to their privacy and may wish to restrict the use of any copies or recordings the client makes of their communications. Clients must seek written permission of MNC before recording any portion of the session and/or posting any portion of said sessions on internet websites such as Facebook, YouTube, TikTok, etc.

Potential benefits:

The potential benefits of receiving mental health services online include both the circumstances in which Michael Noll Counseling considers online mental health services appropriate and the possible advantages of providing those services online. For example, the potential benefits of email may include: (1) being able to send and receive messages at any time of day or night; (2) never having to leave messages with intermediaries; (3) avoiding not only intermediaries, but also voice mail and "telephone tag"; (4) being able to take as long as one wants to compose, and having the opportunity to reflect upon, one's messages; (5) automatically having a record of communications to refer to later; and (6) feeling less inhibited than in person.

Text-based chat has many of the same advantages of convenience, feeling reduced scrutiny from MNC, having time to compose a response and being able to refer back to the chat log for reference.

Video chat is also convenient, allowing clients to potentially be counseled from anywhere, within Wisconsin, once they can gain an internet signal and operate the necessary hardware.

Potential risks:

There are various risks related to electronic provision of counseling services related to the technology used, the distance between counselor and client, and issues related to timeliness. For example, the potential risks of email based counseling may include (1) messages not being received and (2) confidentiality being breached through unencrypted email, lack of password protection or leaving information on a public access computer in a library or internet café. Messages could fail to be received if they are sent to the wrong address (which might also be a breach of confidentiality) or if they just are not noticed by Michael Noll Counseling. Confidentiality could be breached in transit by hackers or Internet service providers or at either end by others with access to the client's account or computer.

People accessing the internet from public locations such as a library, computer lab or café should consider the visibility of their screen to people around them. Position yourself to avoid peeping by those around you. Using cell phones can be risky in that signals are scrambled but rarely encrypted.

Safeguards:

MNC has selected an email account with a private internet website host and an account with iPlum for chat based communications to allow for the highest possible security and confidentiality of the content of your sessions. Your personal information is encrypted and stored on a secure server. Clients are responsible for creating and using additional safeguards when the computer used to access services may be accessed by others, such as creating passwords to use the computer, keeping their email and chat IDs and Passwords secret, and maintaining security of their wireless internet access points (where applicable). Please discuss any such concerns with your counselor early in your first session so as to develop strategies to limit risk.

Alternatives:

Online counseling may not be appropriate for many types of clients including those who have numerous concerns over the risks of internet counseling, clients with active suicidal/homicidal thoughts, and clients who are experiencing active manic/psychotic symptoms.

An alternative to receiving mental health services online would be receiving mental health services in person. The online counselor can and will assist clients who would like to explore face-to-face options in their area. Many state and local agencies will treat low-income clients on a low or no-fee basis. Please feel free to request a referral any time you think a different counseling relationship would be more practical or beneficial for you.

Proxies:

MNC only treats clients who are legally in a position to consent for themselves to receive mental health services. Clients who are not in such a position include children under the age of consent or clients who have a legally appointed guardian.

Confidentiality, Harm and Inquiry:

Information from my evaluation and/or treatment is contained in confidential records at the office. Per Wisconsin mental health law, information provided will be kept confidential with the following exceptions: 1) if I am deemed to present a danger to myself or other; 2) if concerns about possible abuse or neglect arise or domestic violence; 3) if a court order is issued to obtain my records; 4) there is reportable child abuse.

Records:

MNC will maintain records of online counseling services. These records can include reference notes, copies of transcripts of chat and internet communication and session summaries. These records are confidential and will be maintained for seven years as required by applicable legal and ethical standards according to the American Counseling Association. The client will be asked in advance for permission before any audio or video recording will occur on MNC's end.

Procedures:

MNC might not immediately receive an online communication or might experience a local backup. If the client is in a state of crisis or emergency, we recommend contacting a crisis line or an agency local to the client. Clients may utilize the following crisis hotlines:

- National** 800-SUICIDE
800-273-TALK
For the Deaf: 800-799-4TTY
- Winnebago County** (920) 722-7707 - 24 hr Crisis Line - Neenah/Menasha
(920) 722-7707 - 24 hr Crisis Line – Oshkosh
- Outagamie County** (920) 832-4646
- Calumet County** (920) 849-9317 - 24 hr Crisis Line –Chilton
(920) 832-4646 - 24 hr Crisis Line – Appleton

Work with your counselor to identify local resources if you have concerns about the timeliness of responses.

Charges:

Fees are based on the length or type of evaluation and/or treatment, which are determined by the nature of the service. I will be responsible for any charges not covered by insurance, including co-payments and deductibles. Fee schedules are available to me upon request.

Disconnection of Services

If there is ever a disruption of services on the internet then the client will need to call 920-215-1553.

Right to Withdraw Consent: I have the right to withdraw my consent for evaluation and/or treatment at any time by providing a written request to the treating clinician.

Expiration of Consent: This consent to treat will expire 18 months from the date of signature, unless otherwise specifies.

Client Name (print): _____ Date of Birth: _____

Patient Signature: _____ Date: _____

Parent/Guardian Signature: _____ Date: _____