

## CLIENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### Introduction

Welcome to Peninsula Pastoral Counseling Center. We hope that we can be an effective resource for you as you seek to resolve the problems that brought you here.

What follows is some basic information about our center and about the services that we offer. It's a lot to read and digest. Yet, we provide this information because you have a right to know and because you have a central role in your care.

We are a "faith friendly" center with a clear Christian identity. This means that we're open to consider the spiritual or religious resources that our clients bring, when these are especially relevant or helpful.

In particular, we work with the personal faith perspectives of our various clients, and we do not try to impose the faith perspectives of our counselors. Thus, we can serve people with a wide range of religious traditions and beliefs, as well as with people who do not have a particular religious affiliation. If you have spiritual-religious concerns or if you want your counselor to pray with you during sessions, please say so.

We do not provide financial, legal, or medical advice that other professionals are trained to provide. However, we may discuss issues in these areas with you, so that you then may raise these issues with the appropriate professionals of your choice. In the areas of spiritual, religious, and moral issues, we respect the teaching role of the religious communities that clients choose, and we respect the personal consciences of clients. Although we may inform clients of our own ideas in this area, we do not seek to impose these ideas on clients; and we respect the rights of clients to make their own decisions.

Most of our counselors are ordained clergy, and most have current licenses in Virginia as marriage and family therapists and/or as professional counselors. Our staff provides individual, marital, child, and family therapy, as well as family mediation, consultation to clergy and congregations, and educational events.

### Client Rights

Consistent with our basic ethical and religious values, we believe that our clients have certain basic rights, including those that are listed below:

1. Clients have the right to be treated with dignity, respect, and fair treatment, regardless of their race, religion, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, or source of payment.
2. Clients have the right to have their treatment and related information kept private. This information may be shared when clients give written permission, when there is an emergency, when it is necessary to protect people from bodily harm, and when law requires such sharing. These conditions and limitations are described on the "Consent to Treatment" form, which is considered to be part of this document, and in the "Legal Testimony" section that follows.

3. Clients have the right to information from staff in a language that they can understand and they have a right to explanations of their condition and treatment in terminology that is easily understood.
4. Clients have a right to know about their treatment choices, whether a particular treatment is covered by insurance or not, and whether it has a different cost or not.
5. When clients use insurance, they have a right to know the role of their insurance company in treatment.
6. Clients have a right to know professional information about their providers.
7. Clients have a right to know the clinical guidelines that are used in providing and/or managing their care.
8. Clients have a right to know about the complaint, grievance, and appeal process.
9. Clients have a right to know about state and federal laws that relate to their rights and responsibilities.
10. Clients have a right to share in the formulation of their plan of care.
11. Clients have a right to request a different counselor, to get a “second opinion,” and/or to end therapy at any time. It is recommended that clients discuss their wishes with their counselor, at the beginning of a session, before exercising this right.

#### Client Responsibilities

1. Clients have the responsibility to treat other clients and center staff with dignity, respect, and fairness, regardless of their race, religion, gender, ethnicity, age, disability, or job. Actual or threatened abuse (verbal or physical) is grounds for immediate termination of treatment here.
2. Clients have the responsibility to provide the information that is needed for staff to provide the best possible care. This includes the responsibility to ask questions that they may have about their care and to report to the counselor any ways that treatment is perceived as unhelpful or ineffective.
3. When clients are on medication, they have the responsibility to follow their medication plan and to tell counselors about medication changes. If the medication plan is seen as unhelpful, ineffective, or involving unacceptable side effects, clients are responsible for informing both the prescribing physician and the center counselor.
4. Clients are responsible for coming to sessions on time, paying fees for sessions and for missed appointments on time, and calling at least 24 hours in advance (if possible) to cancel appointments. Undue cancellations, missed appointments, and non-payment of fees are grounds for discontinuing services. Clients who stop counseling without paying their fees may not be permitted to resume counseling unless these debts have been

paid. Clients also are responsible for informing counselors as soon as possible of difficulties with appointments and/or fees.

5. Clients are responsible for cooperating with the plans that they and their counselors agree upon. If clients change their minds about the usefulness of a given plan, it's their responsibility to inform their counselors.

### Goals, Methods, and Procedures

Pastoral counseling embraces a wide range of ways of working. The goals, methods, and procedures for your treatment here will depend upon your particular situation and upon your particular counselor's approach. Your counselor's professional statement gives some of this information. If you have questions, please ask.

However, in general terms it can be said that pastoral counseling at this center is a collaborative process in which clients and therapists work together in order to understand client problems, emotional and/or spiritual factors that contribute to these problems, and options for acting to alleviate these problems. Pastoral counselors are trained to deal especially with the spiritual-religious dimensions of life. Although counselors may offer ideas, suggestions, and opinions, clients are responsible for making their own decisions about how to deal with their issues.

### Benefits, Risks, and Alternatives

We accept as clients only those whom we believe that we can help through outpatient pastoral counseling. The first two or three sessions are a time of evaluation, in which clients and therapists discern together how much our center can be of help for the particular issues at hand and whether other professionals may be a better choice. If at any time, it appears to be clear to a therapist that therapy is not helping, a therapist will discuss this with the client(s), may make a referral, or may terminate therapy.

Other providers are more appropriate to help people with active alcohol or drug addiction, high levels of violent impulses, certain thought disorders, management of certain types and doses of medication, and certain other problems. Generally, "mental health disciplines" (such as psychiatry, psychology, social work, etc.) address many of the same issues as pastoral counselors do, though possibly in different ways. If you want to hear about alternatives, please ask your counselor.

We expect that most of the time, most of our clients will increase in their ability to cope with their issues and will experience improvements in their symptoms and relationships. However, there are times when symptoms and/or relationships become more problematic. In particular, in marriage and family counseling, what one person considers to be "better," another person may consider to be "worse," at least in the short term. Sometimes, more open communication can be painful initially, as people are more clear about their differences. Our hope is that people can work through their differences and disagreements in constructive ways. Yet, this is up to the individuals involved and cannot be assured.

If adverse experiences happen, please let your counselor know as soon as possible so that he/she can respond to your need. Especially let your counselor know if you experience violent impulses, difficulty doing ordinary tasks of life, "blackouts," etc.

### Emergencies

In the event of an emergency, dial 911. If there is an urgent need to speak to a counselor, you may call (757) 873-2273 and follow the instructions carefully in order to leave a message for the counselor on call, who will call you back as soon as possible.

### Grievances

If you believe that your rights have been violated here, please discuss this with your counselor. If this issue is not resolved in this discussion or if you choose not to speak first with your counselor, contact the executive director of the center.

Also, you may contact the Virginia Department of Health Professions, 6603 West Broad St., 5<sup>th</sup> floor, Richmond, Virginia 23230-1712, Complaints (804) 662-9943.

### Legal Testimony

From time to time when there has been marriage and/or family counseling, one party requests that a counselor testify on his or her behalf. The other party/parties in such counseling may assert a legal privilege that would prevent a counselor from testifying, unless the judge deems that such testimony is necessary to the proper administration of justice. In order to serve the effectiveness of marriage and family counseling, it is our normal practice to discourage therapist testimony regarding conflicts among clients.

### Conclusion

All of this is a lot to read and digest. Thanks for taking the time. If you have any questions, please talk with your counselor. We hope and pray that your experience here will help you to live your life more abundantly.

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