

## **VALLEY HOPE COUNSELING CENTER INFORMED CONSENT CONTRACT**

Welcome to Valley Hope Counseling Center. This document contains important information about our services and policies and about client rights and responsibilities. Please read it carefully and discuss any questions you have about it with your counselor. **When you sign this document, you are certifying that you understand and agree to our services and policies.**

### **COUNSELING SERVICES**

Valley Hope Counseling Center provides counseling services (also called “therapy”) to adults, adolescents, and children. We do not offer medical or legal services, do not dispense drugs or medications, and do not provide expert or fact witness testimony in legal proceedings.

Counseling has benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings. On the other hand, counseling has been shown to have benefits for people who actively engage with it, including better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. There are no guarantees of what you will experience.

You will normally be the one who decides when therapy will end, with three notable exceptions:

1. If your counselor determines they are not able to help you because of the kind of problem you have or because your counselor’s training or skills are not appropriate, you will be informed and referred to another therapist or agency that might better meet your needs.
2. If you do violence to, threaten, or harass any member of Valley Hope, you will be terminated from any services at Valley Hope immediately.
3. If you do not meet payment agreements or do not show for two sessions, services may be terminated.

Court ordered clients may need to complete 12 sessions of counseling in order to meet court requirements. Like all clients, a court ordered client may choose to terminate counseling at any time. If you have signed a release of information to the court and/or your probation officer, they will be informed of your choice.

### **CLIENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

You, the client, have the right to safe and respectful care, without discrimination as to race, ethnicity, color, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, or national origin. You have the right to ask questions about anything that happens in therapy and to work jointly with your counselor to determine the course of your treatment. You can ask about your counselor’s training, credentials, and professional background, and you can request that they refer you to someone else. Your sessions will not be recorded without your prior written consent. You are free to leave therapy at any time. If you are concerned about your clinical care and client rights, you may speak with your counselor in session or contact Valley Hope in writing.

As a client of Valley Hope, you are responsible for keeping your scheduled appointments or canceling with at least 24 hours’ notice. You are responsible for arriving to appointments on time and for participating in the counseling process with as much openness and honesty as possible. You agree not to record sessions without your counselor’s prior consent. If you feel you are in danger of harming yourself, you agree to call 911 or go to your nearest emergency department.

### **SCHEDULING AND CANCELLATIONS**

Counseling sessions are scheduled in advance and last for 45-50 minutes, unless otherwise agreed upon by you and your counselor. If you are late, your session will still end on time. Client requests to reschedule appointments will be considered if advance notice is given, and your counselor has an available hour. If an appointment is not cancelled 24 hours in advance, you will be charged for the missed appointment. Exceptions will be considered only in times of emergency. If you do not show for two sessions, your counseling may be terminated. At that time, you may have to pay for sessions in advance before being scheduled again. If your counselor has to cancel a session, you will be notified as soon as possible and will not be charged for the cancelled session.

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## PROFESSIONAL FEES

Counseling fees are \$100 per session/\$120 intake assessment. However, Valley Hope is a non-profit agency with generous local grant funding that allows us to determine a fee based upon household income and number of dependents. Your counselor will communicate your fee with you, and changes may be discussed if income or family situations change.

Some Valley Hope counselors are able to accept insurance. If you have a health insurance policy, it will usually provide some coverage for mental health treatment. If choose to use your policy, Valley Hope will bill insurance and provide you with whatever assistance we can in helping you receive the benefits to which you are entitled; however, YOU (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of your fees. It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

You should also be aware that most insurance companies require you to authorize us to provide them with a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes we have to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of the entire record. This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored in a computer. Though all insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, we have no control over what they do with it once it is in their hands. In some cases, they may share the information with a national medical information databank. It is important to remember that you always have the right to pay for my services yourself to avoid the problems described above. If you choose to use your insurance, you agree to allow Valley Hope to bill your insurance company for mental health services rendered and provide the personal information your insurance company requires in order to pay for those services.

Payment for services is to be made at each appointment. Counseling will not be provided without payment, and failure to make payments may result in counseling services being terminated. Court ordered counseling session requirements will not be considered completed if payments have not been made, and the court and/or probation officers may be notified of failure to pay for counseling sessions. Additional fees may be assessed for other services rendered, including but not limited to: professional consultations, court or school appearances, inpatient hospital sessions, extended telephone conversations, copying and mailing records, and travel time if services are rendered other than at Valley Hope's office.

## CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality is essential for the counseling process to be helpful and effective, and Valley Hope counselors place the highest value on maintaining your confidentiality. There are a few legal exceptions to your right to confidentiality:

1. If we believe that you are in immediate danger of harming yourself.
2. If we believe you pose an immediate threat to harm another person.
3. Counselors are mandated to report any known or suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of children or vulnerable adults.
4. A subpoena or court order by a judge may require us to break confidentiality. This situation is very rare. You would be notified if it occurred so that you could attempt to take legal measures to prevent this if you so desired.
5. Finally, counselors have the right to share information with other health professionals who are treating you in order to best coordinate and manage your treatment. If you wish to explicitly deny this sharing of information, you need to inform your counselor in writing. This may influence whether you can continue to receive services here, as preventing the coordination of treatment is typically counterproductive to healing.

Additionally, the counselors at Valley Hope share case information in individual and group supervision sessions for the purposes of providing care, but all counselors are bound to the same rules of confidentiality. We strongly encourage you to share any concerns you may have regarding confidentiality with your counselor. It is essential to your treatment that you can trust your counselor to maintain your confidentiality.

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## PRIVACY PRACTICES

A *Notice of Privacy Practices* is available in the waiting room and electronically. If you would like a copy, please let your counselor know and one will be provided to you.

## ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATIONS

While convenient for communicating, text and email are not secure and should not be used for sharing personal or therapeutic information. Valley Hope counselors do not provide counseling via text or email, and will not accept friend or contact requests from current or former clients on social media platforms. Electronic communications you choose to send with personal content related to your therapy sessions may become part of your treatment record.

## TELEHEALTH

Valley Hope counselors may offer clients telehealth counseling sessions at the discretion of the center, counselor, and the client and/or minor client's guardian. Telehealth counseling, also known as "distance counseling" allows counselors and clients to connect for therapeutic work in a comfortable and easily accessible way when in-person meeting is not possible or optimal. Telehealth is not a good fit for every situation and may not be offered, or you and your counselor might try it and then determine it is inappropriate for you. You can decline or decide to stop telehealth sessions any time without prejudice.

**Telehealth Risks and Limitations:** Agreeing to telehealth counseling means that you and your counselor assume certain responsibilities and risks:

- Both you and your counselor take required and reasonable steps to ensure availability of a reliable internet or cellular connection and functioning telecommunications equipment
- Your counselor agrees to take required and reasonable steps and precautions to protect your privacy, including contacting you from a secure, private location at the number or email address you specify
- You agree to receive calls or do teleconferencing in a quiet, private location where you will not be overheard or interrupted (laundry room, closets, and parked vehicles are all options)
- Both you and your counselor agree neither to record nor allow recording of sessions without prior written consent
- In the event of a technology failure during a distance counseling session, your counselor will take immediate steps to attempt to call you back on the number you provided or reconnect through the secure platform
- Clients are responsible for paying or arranging for payment of the same fee as an in-person session with their counselor at the end of a telehealth session

## CONTACTING US

Valley Hope's primary form of communication is via telephone and our main office number is at 540-941-8933. Our office is open Monday through Thursday, but a counselor may not be immediately available by telephone. When no one is available to answer the phone, please leave a message for your counselor in their voice mail box. All counselors check their messages regularly and will return your call as soon as possible during office hours. When leaving a message, please leave your name, the number where you can be reached, and the best possible times to reach you. If you are having a mental health emergency and cannot reach a counselor at the office, you may leave a message for a counselor on our emergency phone number: 540-241-6014. If for some reason your urgent call is not returned, please call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and agree to abide by its terms. You also give permission to Valley Hope to provide counseling services to you and/or your minor child for whom you are a legal guardian.

Client/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Client/Guardian Signature (printed or typed): \_\_\_\_\_