

## CONFIDENTIALITY



Counseling is a confidential process designed to help an individual address his or her concerns, come to a greater understanding of his or her self and learn effective personal and interpersonal coping strategies. It involves a relationship between the client and counselor who has the desire and willingness to help the client accomplish his/her individual goals. Counseling involves sharing sensitive, personal and private information that may at times be distressing. During the course of counseling, there may be periods of increased anxiety or confusion. The outcome of counseling is often positive; however, the level of satisfaction for any individual is not predictable. The counselor is able to support the client throughout the counseling process.

Confidentiality means that the counselor should respect the privacy of clients and hold in confidence all information obtained in the course of professional service. Information generally considered to be confidential includes (but is not limited to) client's identity, content of professional discussions, professional opinions about the client, progress in counseling, attendance at appointments and data in the clinical record.

Note to students/clients: No record of counseling is contained in any academic, educational or job placement file.

Relative Confidentiality and Exceptions to Confidentiality supports the proposition that under certain circumstances counselors may ethically disclose information about a client. Exceptions to confidentiality:

- If there is evidence of clear and imminent danger of harm to self and/or others, a counselor is legally required to report this information to the authorities responsible for ensuring safety.
- Providing information to legal and law enforcement officials in conformity with relevant regulations. A court order issued by a judge may require the CDS staff to release information contained in records and/or require a counselor to testify in a court hearing.
- When privileged communication has been waived by the client.
- Georgia state law requires that staff of counseling services who learns of, or strongly suspect physical or sexual abuse or neglect of any person under 18 years of age must report this information to county child protection services.

- The counseling staff works as a team. Your counselor may consult with other counseling staff to provide the best possible care. These consultations are for professional and training purposes.

### Rights of the client:

- Clients have a right to privacy
- Clients have a right to know the limits of, or exceptions to confidentiality
- Clients may choose to voluntarily sign a 'Release of Information or Consent Form – see Appendix' which can designate the specific party or individual(s) that the client wishes the counselor to speak with on his/her behalf, and only on those issues that the client permits the counselor to discuss.

### Role of counselor:

- To disclose the limits of confidentiality early in the treatment relationship
- To secure and lock records
- To ensure that records (computerized and hard copies) are not left where unauthorized persons can read them
- To not discuss confidential information in any setting unless privacy can be ensured. This includes, but is not limited to hallways, waiting rooms, elevators and restaurants.
- To respect the client's right to privacy. Counselors should not solicit private information from clients unless it is essential to providing service, or conducting clinical evaluations or research.
- To only disclose personal information when a valid consent form has been signed.
- To inform clients about the disclosure of confidential material.
- To seek agreement from group members (prior to the start of the group process with family, couples, and other groups with students) concerning each individual's right to confidentiality and obligation to preserve the confidentiality of information shared by others. Counselors should inform participants that counselors cannot guarantee that all participants will honor such agreements.
- To transfer or dispose of identifying information in a manner that protects the client's confidentiality (use of shredder in a private location for disposing of documents).
- To afford clients reasonable access to their records
- To obtain informed consent of clients before taping, recording, or permitting third party observation of their activities.
- To protect the confidences of others contained in the client record.