

Disclaimer and consent:

I understand that “ask a therapist” is not therapy and does not replace therapy in any form. If I am feeling depressed or suicidal, I will not use this service and I will instead contact a therapist, suicide hotline, or ER immediately. This service is for adults aged 18 or older. I understand that the therapist will decide if my question, concern, need is appropriate for this service. If it is not, the therapist will help me find a better help source. The therapists reserve the right to end any communication if the client is inappropriate or needs a different kind of help. We will terminate the session and provide a better referral.

The purpose of this document is to inform you, the client, about many aspects of online “ask a therapist” services: the process, the advice given, the potential risks and benefits of services, safeguards against those risks, and alternatives to online services. Please read this entire document and click that it has been read and understood, please sign your name.

A. Process

1) Possible misunderstandings: The client should be aware that misunderstandings are possible with telephone and text-based modalities.

Understand that nonverbal cues are relatively lacking. Even with video webcam software, misunderstandings may occur due to connection problems causing image delays or less than optimal image quality. Therapists 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 or chatting before, please have patience with the process and clarify information if you think your therapist has not understood you well. Also, please be patient if your therapist asks for periodic clarification. All sessions and messaging are in English.

2) Turnaround time: Using asynchronous (not in "real time") communication such as messaging entails a “lag” of response. The therapist will make every effort to respond to message requests within a 24-hour period. If the client is in a state of crisis or emergency, the therapist recommends the client contact a crisis line or an agency local to the client. Clients may also utilize 1-800- SUICIDE or 1- 800-273-TALK in the US (For the deaf or hard-of hearing: 1-800-799- 4TTY).

3) Privacy: Although the internet provides the appearance of anonymity and privacy in counseling, privacy is more of an issue online than in person. We have chosen to use Spruce app for chat communications between the counselor and clients which are HIPAA compliant. The client is responsible for securing his or her own computer hardware, internet access points, and password security.

The therapist has a right to his privacy and may wish to restrict the use of any copies or recordings the client makes of their communications. Clients must seek the written permission of the therapist before recording any portion of the session and/or posting any portion of said session on internet websites such as Facebook or YouTube. Therapists can not become friends

with clients on social media; such as Facebook, Twitter, etc...

B. Potential benefits: The potential benefits of receiving advice online or having the opportunity to ask a therapist a question include the convenience for clients to potentially receive an answer or support to a small issue or question from anywhere once an internet signal and necessary hardware is secured. It also allows for a quicker response time without the lengthy process of scheduling a therapy session and spending time with therapist for one potential question or issue. Another benefit is having time to compose a response, and being able to refer back to the chat log for reference. The benefits of using asynchronous messages may include (1) being able to send and receive message at any time (2) never having to leave messages or voicemails; (3) being able to take as long as one likes to compose a message, and having the opportunity to reflect upon it; (4) automatically having a record of communication to refer to later; and (5) feeling less inhibited than in person.

C. Potential risks: There are various risks related to electronic provision of these services related to the technology used, the distance between therapist and client, and issues related to timeliness. For example, the potential risks of message based counseling may include (1) messages not being received and (2) confidentiality being breached, 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 breach of confidentiality) or if they just are not noticed by the counselor. 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 others' ability to read your screen. Using cell phones can also be risky in that signals are scrambled but rarely encrypted.

D. Safeguards: Your therapist has selected an account with Spruce Health for messaging and video communications to allow for the highest possible security and confidentiality of the content of your sessions. In order to benefit from these safeguards, the client is required to download, register and utilize the chat and video software from Spruce. For Spruce, you will be sent an invitation from your therapist to download the Spruce app that will link you to your provider. Your personal information is encrypted and stored on a secure server in compliance with HIPAA regulations. The client is 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. Please discuss any additional concerns with your therapist early in your first session so as to develop strategies to limit risk.

E. Alternatives: Online advice chatting is a non-acute service and 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 or homicidal thoughts, and clients who are experiencing active manic/psychotic symptoms. An alternative would be to receive mental health services online or in person. The therapists can and will assist clients who would like to explore mental health options in their area. Please feel free to request a referral at any time you think a different counseling relationship would be more practical or beneficial for you.

G. Confidentiality of the client: Maintaining client confidentiality is extremely important to the therapist and the therapist will take ordinary care and consideration to prevent unnecessary disclosure. Information about the client will only be released with his or her express and written permission with the exceptions of the following cases: 1) If the therapist believes that someone is seriously considering and likely to attempt suicide;

2) if the therapist believes that someone intends to assault another person; 3) if the therapist believes someone is engaging or intends to engage in behavior which will expose another person to a potentially life-threatening communicable disease; 4) if a therapist suspects abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a minor or of an incapacitated adult; 5) if a therapist believes that someone's mental condition leaves the person gravely disabled.

H. Records: The therapist will maintain records of online discussion and/ or consultation 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 as required by applicable legal and ethical standards according to the American Psychological Association, Marriage and Family Therapists and Mental Health Counselors.

I. Procedures: The therapist might not immediately receive an online communication or might experience a local backup affecting internet connectivity. If the client is in a state of crisis or emergency, the counselor recommends contacting a crisis line or an agency local to the client. Clients may utilize the following crisis hotlines: 1-800-SUICIDE or 1-800-273-TALK (For the deaf or hard-of hearing: 1-800-799-4TTY) in the US otherwise contact your local crisis line.

J. Payments: All payments will be processed through Spruce. Payment of fees is expected at the time of service. Client agrees to pay for each service at the time it is rendered. Client understands they are responsible for all charges incurred.

K. Disconnection of Services: If there is ever a disruption of services on the internet then the therapist will call number you have provided and we will discuss how to proceed with session. If you do not answer and computer communication is down, the session will be concluded. You will have to reach out to the therapist for another appointment when ready.

4) APPOINTMENTS:

Appointments will be set up for phone sessions by requesting an appointment with therapist. For text or email, please write your inquiry and allow us 24 hours to respond. We will respond as quickly as we can.

APPOINTMENTS NOT CANCELLED 48 HOURS PRIOR TO THE MEETING TIME ARE CHARGED.

CHARGES:

Email question – \$20 per questions

Text question- \$20 per question

Phone call 10 min increments \$25 for 10 minutes

PAYMENT IS DUE WHEN SERVICES ARE RENDERED.