



Counseling Services

Informed Consent Agreement

Welcome

Welcome to Counseling Services at USC Upstate. This informed consent explains the services we provide, your rights and responsibilities as a client, confidentiality, telehealth, emergency procedures, and other important information to help you make an informed decision about participating in counseling services.

To help maintain a safe and secure environment, security cameras monitor the lobby and other public areas of our facility. Cameras are not located in counseling rooms, examination rooms, restrooms, or other areas where privacy is expected. Recordings are maintained in accordance with applicable laws and university policies and are accessed only by authorized personnel for security purposes.

Accessibility: USC Upstate Counseling Services is committed to providing equal access to services. If you require reasonable accommodations because of a disability or need this document in an alternative format, please notify our office.

About Counseling Services

Clinician Description: Counseling Services offers individual, group, and/or couples counseling. You have the right to choose the counselor with whom you work and to be informed of the counselor's education, experience, and other qualifications. Your provider is either a) a licensed practitioner who holds and maintains a state license to practice therapy in their field(s) of expertise. Licensed counselors are required to comply with the laws of the state in which they are licensed as well as to follow the professional Code of Ethics of the national organization with whom they are affiliated, or b) a graduate student intern who is supervised by a licensed practitioner as well as a faculty supervisor and must comply with the state, organization, and agency requirements of the clinical supervisor. Sessions with a graduate student intern will be audio recorded for supervision purposes.

Scope of Services: Counselors and psychiatric providers will only provide services within the scope of their training and identified areas of expertise. If a client's need falls outside the counselor's practice area, they will provide options for referral and assist you in obtaining alternative services. Please refer to our Scope of Services policy available on paper in our lobby or on our website for more information.

Client Eligibility for Services: Students must be actively enrolled for at least 1 credit hour to engage in counseling, testing or medication management services. If you withdraw from Upstate or graduate, you are no longer eligible to receive services. We do not treat USC Upstate faculty or staff in any capacity. Regarding couples therapy, at least one member of the couple must be a currently enrolled USC Upstate

student. Please refer to our Client Eligibility for Services policy available in our lobby or on our website for more information.

Services and Treatment

Discussion of Treatment Plan: Services are provided to assist in reaching personal goals. Within a reasonable period after initiating treatment, the clinician will discuss an understanding of the problem, the treatment plan, therapeutic objectives, and potential outcomes. Multiple approaches may be used based on the specific situation, including behavioral, cognitive, system/family, developmental, and psycho-educational techniques.

Termination of Therapy: The length and timing of treatment termination depend on the specifics of the treatment plan and progress made. It is advisable to plan for termination in collaboration with the clinician. A plan for termination will be discussed as treatment goals are approached. Clients may discontinue therapy at any time. If it is determined that the client is not benefiting from treatment, a discussion of treatment alternatives, such as referral, changing the treatment plan, or terminating therapy, may be initiated. This discussion is best conducted in a planned termination session if possible.

Medication Management: Some students may benefit from a referral to a psychiatric provider as part of their treatment. Participation in medication management is voluntary, and the decision to take medication is entirely yours. Psychiatric services are provided by a nurse practitioner or physician who specializes in the evaluation and treatment of mental health conditions through medication. Please inform your psychiatric provider of all medications you are currently taking, including over-the-counter medications, supplements, and any medical conditions that may affect your treatment. If medication is recommended, your psychiatric provider will discuss:

- Your diagnosis and expected prognosis.
- The proposed treatment and its potential risks and benefits.
- Available alternative treatment options, including their risks and benefits.
- The potential risks of declining or discontinuing treatment.
- If you are prescribed medication, you may have your prescription filled at the pharmacy of your choice. Unless otherwise directed by your psychiatric provider or in the event of a medical emergency, do not discontinue your medication without consulting your provider.

Counseling and medication management are intended to work together. While receiving psychiatric services through Counseling Services, you are expected to remain engaged in counseling with your assigned therapist. At a minimum, you are required to attend one counseling session each fall semester and one each spring semester, unless more frequent appointments are clinically indicated.

Your primary therapist and psychiatric provider work collaboratively to coordinate your care. If you have questions or concerns regarding your medication, please contact Counseling Services at (864) 503-5195 so your therapist can coordinate with your psychiatric provider as appropriate.

Please note the following:

- Prescription refills, medication changes, and new prescriptions are the sole responsibility of your psychiatric provider. Counseling Services clinicians cannot authorize medication refills or make changes to your medications.

- Prescription medications are intended only for the individual for whom they are prescribed. Sharing prescription medication with another person is illegal and may place others at risk.
- If you believe you are experiencing a medical emergency or a serious reaction related to your medication, call **911** immediately or seek emergency medical care.

Appointments, Attendance, and Fees

Appointments: All current USC Upstate students are eligible to receive counseling services with no session limit. Therapy sessions are based on a 50 minute-hour and unless otherwise specified, there is no charge for sessions. Counseling Services offers both face-to-face and distance appointments for therapy and medication management sessions. Unless otherwise notified, your clinician will wait 15 minutes for a late client before a “no show” is considered.

No Shows & Cancellation Fees: You will receive a text and email reminder of your appointment. It is your responsibility to keep track of your appointments. Counseling Services **requires a 24-hour cancellation notice to avoid a late cancellation fee. Late cancellations and No shows will incur a \$25 fee.** Your first late cancellation/no-show of each academic year will be waived. After that initial waiver, if you do not cancel/reschedule with 24-hour notice or do not show for your appointment, you will be charged a \$25 fee. Your fees **MUST** be paid in full before scheduling any subsequent appointments.

Due to the limited availability of psychiatry appointments, we do not waive the same day cancellation/reschedule and no-show fees for medication management sessions. You will receive an email reminder as well as a phone call to assist you in keeping these appointments. If you fail to cancel/reschedule with a 24-hour notice or do not show for your scheduled time, you will be charged a \$25 fee, and this fee **MUST** be paid prior to scheduling any subsequent appointments.

Payment of Fees: You may pay any fees electronically utilizing The Marketplace. You will receive an email receipt from The Marketplace. By signing this document, you authorize the use of The Marketplace to collect payment for fees and services, and you consent to email as an acceptable format for The Marketplace receipt. Payments made via Marketplace are not encrypted. You may also pay by cash or check at Counseling Services; this will be processed via the USC Upstate Bursar’s office. You may find the link for The Marketplace at [USC Upstate Counseling Services](#).

Communication

Communication: Use of alternative electronic communications such as texting, secure email, and telehealth platforms can be used to improve your access to care at Counseling Services. At the same time, Counseling Services recognizes that some of these methods of communication are not completely secure or private. For example, such communications could be addressed to the wrong person, accessed by an unauthorized third party while on your device, in your account, or during transmission, or automatically deleted by an app.

- Secure Messaging via the USC Upstate MyHealth Patient Portal (utilizing your Upstate email and/or text to your cell phone)
- Written notification to your permanent and/or local address
- Phone call or voicemail message
- Distance Counseling/Tele-Psychiatry platform.

You may opt out of any of these methods of communication by providing written notification to your therapist. You may access the MyHealth Patient Portal by clicking on [MyHealthPortal](#).

Telehealth Services

Telehealth is the use of secure electronic communication technology to provide counseling or psychiatric services when you and your provider are in different locations. By signing this agreement, you consent to receive services through telehealth when clinically appropriate.

The same laws protecting the privacy and confidentiality of your health information apply to telehealth services. To comply with state licensing laws, you must be physically located in a state where your provider is legally authorized to practice at the time of your appointment. Counseling Services does not provide emergency or crisis intervention through telehealth. If your provider determines that telehealth is not clinically appropriate or that you would benefit from in-person services or a higher level of care, you may be asked to attend appointments in person or be referred to another provider. As with any form of treatment, outcomes cannot be guaranteed.

Telehealth Expectations:

To help ensure a safe, effective, and confidential session, you agree to:

- Participate from a quiet, private location that is free from distractions.
- Avoid using public computers or unsecured public Wi-Fi.
- Dress appropriately and participate in a manner consistent with a professional healthcare appointment.
- Provide your current physical location at the beginning of each telehealth session.
- Present your USC Upstate student ID or another valid photo ID when requested to verify your identity.

If your provider determines that your environment or behavior is not appropriate for a telehealth appointment, the session may be ended and rescheduled as an in-person appointment or you may be referred to another provider.

Technology and Privacy:

Although Counseling Services uses secure technology, telehealth carries risks that are beyond our control. Technical problems, internet disruptions, or unauthorized access may interrupt or affect the privacy of a session. If technical difficulties occur, your provider will attempt to reconnect by telephone or videoconference. If the session cannot be reestablished, please contact Counseling Services to reschedule. Personally identifiable images or information from a telehealth session will not be shared without your written authorization except as otherwise permitted or required by law.

Emergency Procedures for Telehealth

For your safety, the following procedures apply to all telehealth appointments:

- Telehealth is not appropriate if you are experiencing suicidal or homicidal thoughts, psychosis, or another crisis that cannot be safely managed remotely. Your provider may determine that a higher level of care is needed.
- You must provide an Emergency Contact Person (ECP) who agrees to assist you in a life-threatening emergency, including transporting you to a hospital if necessary. Unless you direct us otherwise, Counseling Services will use the emergency contact listed in your university records.
- You agree to identify the nearest hospital or emergency department you would use during a mental health emergency based on your location at the time of the appointment.

- If you are experiencing a life-threatening emergency, call **911** immediately.
- If you are in crisis during business hours, walk into Counseling Services or call **864-503-5195 (Option 1)** to speak with a clinician. After hours, call **864-503-5195 (Option 2)** to reach the on-call counselor.

If you have questions about telehealth services or their limitations, please discuss them with your provider before signing this agreement.

Privacy and Confidentiality

Client Information: Your personal information will not be released without your express consent or pursuant to the legally permissible disclosures stated below. Every effort is made to protect your privacy and maintain client confidentiality. However, please note that phone and email communication is not encrypted and cannot be guaranteed secure. In addition, payments made via The Marketplace are not encrypted. All records including email are kept for ten years. Your information may be shared with USC Upstate Health Services if there is a need for coordination of care regarding your emotional and physical well-being.

Use of Artificial Intelligence: CS/HS may use artificial intelligence tools (e.g., for documentation support, appointment management, or improving service quality). These tools are used under provider oversight and comply with privacy and confidentiality standards. You may request more information about how AI is utilized in your care.

Confidentiality: The confidentiality of each client is paramount to the success of the counseling relationship. What you say in your therapy sessions is private and will not be discussed except in the below-mentioned situations. However, it is your choice who you talk to about your therapy and your thoughts and feelings. Your records, both electronic and hard copy, will be kept in a secure and locked location.

Please note that the following exceptions to confidentiality apply:

- Information may be shared with a clinical supervisor and/or peer consultation group for treatment purposes.
- If you have signed an *Authorization for Disclosure of Protected Health Information* form allowing disclosure of information to a third party.
- If it is a therapist's judgment that there is a substantial risk that a client will do physical harm to themselves in the near future, it is the therapist's duty to take steps to protect the client's safety.
- If it is a therapist's judgment that there is a substantial risk that a client will do physical harm to an identifiable other person (or persons) in the near future, the therapist will take steps to protect the safety of the endangered person (or persons).
- If information is shared with a therapist indicating that a child or dependent adult is currently being abused, state law requires that the information is reported to the Department of Social Services serving the area where the child or dependent adult lives.
- A counselor may be ordered to testify in legal proceedings and/or turn over records if lawfully issued by subpoenas and court orders. Counseling Services will inform you if a subpoena is received and will give you an opportunity to move to protect your records prior to releasing any information pursuant to a subpoena.

Audio/Video Recording: To preserve privacy and confidentiality, you are not permitted to audio or video record any session or interaction with CS/HS providers whether in-person or virtual without the written consent of the provider. Further, you are not permitted to record in clinic.

Emergency Procedures

Emergency Situations: If you are experiencing a life-threatening emergency, please contact 911 immediately. If you are in crisis during business hours (Monday – Thursday 8:00 am – 6pm, and Friday’s 8:00am-12:30 pm), please walk into Counseling Services, or call 864-503-5195 and select option #1 to speak with a Clinician. If you need to speak with a counselor after office hours, please call our main number at 864-503-5195, select Option 2, and you will be connected with an after-hours therapist. *Please note: email and secure messaging should not be used for a crisis situation and our afterhours crisis services should not be utilized in a life-threatening situation at which time you should immediately seek emergency services before calling a counselor.*

In the event of a life-threatening emergency (threat to self or others) your information may be shared with the USC Upstate Campus Assessment, Referral, and Evaluation (CARE) team members (including but not limited to the following Departments: Dean of Students, Athletics, Student Involvement, Housing & Residential Life, Health Services, and Campus Public Safety/Police).

Questions, Concerns, or Complaints

If at any time for any reason you are dissatisfied with your services, we encourage you to express your concerns with your counselor. If your counselor is not able to resolve your concerns, you may report your complaints to the Director of Counseling Services (864-503-5195).

Consent and Acknowledgement

I have read and understand the information provided above. I have the right to discuss any of this information with my therapist and to have any questions I may have regarding my treatment answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw my consent to services by providing written notification to USC Upstate Counseling Services.

If reviewing in paper format, please collect signatures.

Student Signature

USC Upstate Staff (Witness) Signature