

# Stonegate Counseling Associates, PC

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## **INFORMATION, AUTHORIZATION, & CONSENT TO TREATMENT**

Welcome to **Stonegate Counseling Associates, PC**. We are very pleased you selected our facility for your therapy, and we are sincerely looking forward to assisting you. This document is designed to inform you about what you can expect from your therapist or group leader, policies regarding confidentiality and emergencies, and several other details regarding your treatment here at **Stonegate Counseling**. Although providing this document is part of an ethical obligation to our profession, more importantly, it is part of our commitment to you to keep you fully informed of every part of your therapeutic experience. Please know that your relationship with your therapist or group leader is a collaborative one, and we welcome any questions, comments, or suggestions regarding your course of therapy at any time.

### **Background Information, Theoretical Views, & Client Participation**

Information regarding your therapist's educational background and experience may be found on our website under his or her name. Please feel free to view that information at [www.stonegategounsel.com](http://www.stonegategounsel.com).

It is our belief that as people become more aware and accepting of themselves, they are more capable of finding a sense of peace and contentment in their lives. However, self-awareness and self-acceptance are goals that may take a long time to achieve. Some clients need only a few sessions to achieve these goals, whereas others may require months or even years of therapy. As a client, you are in complete control, and you may end your relationship with your therapist/group leader at any point.

In order for therapy to be most successful, it is important for you to take an active role. This means working on the things you and your therapist talk about both during and between sessions. This also means avoiding any mind-altering substances like alcohol or non-prescription drugs for at least eight hours prior to your therapy sessions. Generally, the more of yourself you are willing to invest, the greater the return.

Furthermore, it is our policy to only see clients who we believe have the capacity to resolve their own problems with our assistance. It is our intention to empower you in your growth process to the degree that you are capable of facing life's challenges in the future without your therapist. We also don't believe in creating dependency or prolonging therapy if the therapeutic intervention does not seem to be helping. If this is the case, your therapist will direct you to other resources that will be of assistance to you. Your personal development is our number one priority. We encourage you to let us know if you feel transferring to another facility or another therapist is necessary at any time. Our goal is to facilitate healing and growth, and we are very committed to helping you in whatever way seems to produce maximum benefit. If at any point you are unable to keep your appointments or we don't hear from you for one month, we will need to close your chart. However, reopening your chart and resuming treatment is always an option.

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### **Confidentiality & Records**

Your communications with your therapist will become part of a clinical record of treatment, and it is referred to as Protected Health Information (PHI). Your PHI will be kept in a file stored in a locked cabinet in our locked office.

Your therapist will always keep everything you say to him or her completely confidential, with the following exceptions: (1) you direct your therapist to tell someone else and you sign a "Release of Information" form; (2) your therapist determines that you are a danger to yourself or to others; (3) you report information about the abuse of a child, an elderly person, or a disabled individual who may require protection; or (4) your therapist is ordered by a judge to disclose information. In the latter case, your therapist's license does provide him or her with the ability to uphold what is legally termed "privileged communication." Privileged communication is your right as a client to have a confidential relationship with a counselor. Georgia has a very good track record in respecting this legal right. If for some unusual reason a judge were to order the disclosure of your private information, this order can be appealed. We cannot guarantee that the appeal will be sustained, but we will do everything in our power to keep what you say confidential.

Please note that in couple's counseling, your therapist does not agree to keep secrets. Information revealed in any context may be discussed with either partner.

### **Structure and Cost of Sessions**

Your therapist agrees to provide psychotherapy for the **fee of \$80-200 per 50 minute session, \$120-225 per 75 minute session, and/or \$145-250 per 90 minute therapy session**, unless otherwise negotiated by you. Doing psychotherapy by telephone is not ideal, and needing to talk to your therapist between sessions may indicate that you need extra support. If this is the case, you and your therapist will need to explore adding sessions or developing other resources you have available to help you. Telephone calls that exceed 10 minutes in duration will be billed at \$2 per minute. The fee for each session will be due at the conclusion of the session. Cash, personal checks, Visa, MasterCard, Discover, or American Express are acceptable for payment, and we will provide you with a receipt. The receipt of payment may also be used as a statement for insurance if applicable to you. Please note that there is a \$30 fee for any returned checks.

Insurance companies have many rules and requirements specific to certain plans. Unless otherwise negotiated, it is your responsibility to find out your insurance company's policies and to file for insurance reimbursement. We will be glad to provide you with a statement for your insurance company and to assist you with any questions you may have in this area.

### **Cancellation Policy**

In the event that you are unable to keep an appointment, you must notify your therapist at least 24 hours in advance. If such advance notice is not received, you will be financially responsible for the session you missed. Please note that insurance companies do not reimburse for missed sessions.

### **In Case of an Emergency**

**Stonegate Counseling Associates** is considered to be an outpatient facility, and we are set up to accommodate individuals who are reasonably safe and resourceful. We do not carry pagers nor are we available at all times. If at any time this does not feel like sufficient support, please inform your therapist, and he or she can discuss additional resources or transfer your case to a therapist or clinic with 24-hour availability.

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Generally, your therapist will return phone calls within 24-48 hours. If you have a mental health emergency, we encourage you not to wait for a call back, but to do one or more of the following:

- Call Behavioral Health Link/GCAL: 800-715-4225
- Call Lifeline at (800) 273-8255 (National Crisis Line)
- Call 911 or go to the Emergency Room of your choice

### **Professional Relationship**

Psychotherapy is a professional service we will provide to you. Because of the nature of therapy, your relationship with your therapist has to be different from most relationships. It may differ in how long it lasts, the objectives, or the topics discussed. It must also be limited to only the relationship of therapist and client. If you and your therapist were to interact in any other ways, you would then have a "dual relationship," which could prove to be harmful to you in the long run and is, therefore, unethical in the mental health profession. Dual relationships can set up conflicts between the therapist's interests and the client's interests, and then the client's (your) interests might not be put first. In order to offer all of our clients the best care, your therapist's judgment needs to be unselfish and purely focused on your needs. This is why your relationship with your therapist must remain professional in nature.

Additionally, there are important differences between therapy and friendship. Friends may see your position only from their personal viewpoint and experiences. Friends may want to find quick and easy solutions to your problems so they can feel helpful. These short-term solutions may not be in your long-term best interest. Friends do not usually follow up on their advice to see whether it was useful. They may *need* to have you do what they advise. A therapist offers you choices and helps you choose what is best for you. A therapist helps you learn how to solve problems better and make better decisions. A therapist's responses to your situation are based on tested theories and methods of change.

You should also know that therapists are required to keep the identity of their clients confidential. As much as your therapist would like to, for your confidentiality he or she will not address you in public unless you speak to him or her first. Your therapist also must decline any invitation to attend gatherings with your family or friends. Lastly, when your therapy is completed, your therapist will not be able to be a friend to you like your other friends. In sum, it is the duty of your therapist to always maintain a professional role. Please note that these guidelines are not meant to be discourteous in any way, they are strictly for your long-term protection.

### **Statement Regarding Ethics, Client Welfare & Safety**

***Stonegate Counseling Associates*** assures you that our services will be rendered in a professional manner consistent with the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association and/or the American Counseling Association and/or the National Association of Social Workers and/or the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy. If at any time you feel your therapist is not performing in an ethical or professional manner, we ask that you please let him or her know immediately. If the two of you are unable to resolve your concern, please contact Joseph Bucha at (706)546-7550.

Due to the very nature of psychotherapy, as much as we would like to guarantee specific results regarding your therapeutic goals, we are unable to do so. However, your therapist, with your participation, will work to achieve the best possible results for you. Please also be aware that changes made in therapy may affect other people in your life. For example, an increase in your assertiveness may not always be welcomed by others. It is our intention to help you manage changes in your interpersonal relationships as they arise, but it is important for you to be aware of this possibility nonetheless.

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Additionally, at times people find that they feel somewhat worse when they first start therapy before they begin to feel better. This may occur as you begin discussing certain sensitive areas of your life. However, a topic usually isn't sensitive unless it needs attention. Therefore, discovering the discomfort is actually a success. Once you and your therapist are able to target your specific treatment needs and the particular modalities that work the best for you, help is generally on the way.

### **Technology Statement**

In our ever-changing technological society, there are several ways we could potentially communicate and/or follow each other electronically. It is of utmost importance to us that we maintain your confidentiality, respect your boundaries, and ascertain that your relationship with your therapist remains therapeutic and professional. Therefore, we've developed the following policies:

**Cell phones and Landline telephones:** It is important for you to know that even landline telephones may not be completely secure and confidential. There is a possibility that someone could overhear or even intercept your conversations with special technology. Individuals who have access to your telephone or your telephone bill may be able to determine who you have talked to, who initiated that call, and how long the conversation lasted. If you have a landline and you provided us with that phone number, we may contact you on this line from our own landline in our office or from a cell phone, typically only for purposes of setting up an appointment if needed. If this is not an acceptable way to contact you, please let your therapist know. Telephone conversations (other than just setting up appointments) are billed at your therapist's hourly rate. In addition to landlines, cell phones may not be completely secure or confidential. There is also a possibility that someone could overhear or intercept your conversations. Be aware that individuals who have access to your cell phone or your cell phone bill may be able to see who you have talked to, who initiated that call, how long the conversation was, and where each party was located when that call occurred. However, we realize that most people have and utilize a cell phone. We may also use a cell phone to contact you, typically only for purposes of setting up an appointment if needed. Additionally, your therapist may keep your phone number in his/her cell phone. His/her phone is password protected. If this is a problem, please let your therapist know, and you he/she will be glad to discuss other options.

**Text Messaging and Email:** Both text messaging and emailing are not secure means of communication and may compromise your confidentiality. We realize that many people prefer to text and/or email because it is a quick way to convey information. **However, please know that it is our policy to utilize these means of communication strictly for appointment confirmations (nothing that could be inferred as therapy).** Please do not bring up any therapeutic content via text or email to prevent compromising your confidentiality. If you do, please know that your therapist will not respond. **You also need to know that we are required to keep a summary or a copy of all emails and texts as part of your clinical record that address anything related to therapy.**

**Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, Twitter, Etc:** It is our policy not to accept requests from any current or former clients on social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, etc. because it may compromise your confidentiality.

**Google, Bing, etc.:** It is our policy not to search for our clients on Google or any other search engine. We respect your privacy and make it a policy to allow you to share information about yourself to your therapist as you feel appropriate. If there is content on the Internet that you would like to share with your therapist for therapeutic reasons, please print this material and bring it to your session.

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**Faxing Medical Records:**

If you authorize us (in writing) via a "Release of Information" form to send your medical records or any form of protected health information to another entity for any reason, we may need to fax that information to the authorized entity. It is our responsibility to let you know that fax machines may not be a secure form of transmitting information. Additionally, information that has been faxed may also remain in the hard drive of our fax machine. However, our fax machine is kept behind two locks in our office. And, when our fax machine needs to be replaced, we will destroy the hard drive in a manner that makes future access to information on that device inaccessible.

**Recommendations to Websites or Applications (Apps):**

During the course of treatment, your therapist may recommend that you visit certain websites for pertinent information or self-help. She or he may also recommend certain apps that could be of assistance to you and enhance your treatment. Please be aware that websites and apps may have tracking devices that allow automated software or other entities to know that you've visited these sites or applications. They may even utilize your information to attempt to sell you other products. Additionally, anyone who has access to the device you used to visit these sites and/or apps, may be able to see you have been to these sites by viewing the history on your device. Therefore, it is your responsibility to decide and communicate to your therapist if you would like this information as adjunct to your treatment or if you prefer your therapist does not make these recommendations.

In summary, technology is constantly changing, and there are implications to all of the above that we may not realize at this time. Please feel free to ask questions, and know we are open to any feelings or thoughts you have about these and other modalities of communication.

**Our Agreement to Enter into a Therapeutic Relationship**

We are sincerely looking forward to facilitating you on your journey toward healing and growth. If you have any questions about any part of this document, please ask your therapist.

Please print, date, and sign your name below indicating that you have read and understand the contents of this form, you agree to the policies of your relationship with your therapist/group leader, and you are authorizing your therapist/group leader to begin treatment with you. **Your signature also indicates you have received the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) information.**

**Client Name (Please Print)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Client Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

**If Applicable:**

**Parent's or Legal Guardian's Name (Please Print)** \_\_\_\_\_

**Parent's or Legal Guardian's Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_

The signature of the Therapist below indicates that she or he has discussed this form with you and has answered any questions you have regarding this information.

**Therapist's Signature** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date** \_\_\_\_\_