

## **COMPLAINTS POLICY**

ALL COVID HERTS COUNSELLING COUNSELLORS ARE MEMBERS OF BACP, UKCP, BPS AND HCPC AND WORK TO THEIR CODES OF ETHICS

All complaints should be taken up firstly with Cheryl Sandford who would then advise of the official complaints procedure through the BACP. Complaints can be sent via our patient feedback page.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY: COUNSELLING SERVICE POLICY**

The counsellors at COVID Herts Counselling are aware of their responsibility both to all patients who use the telephone service for counselling and to the wider community. At times there can be tensions between the need to maintain an agreement of confidentiality with the individual patient, and the counsellor's awareness of the needs of the wider community. This statement aims to define the response of the Counselling Service to these tensions.

All counsellors, therapists and psychologists are members of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy, and adhere to its Ethical Framework for Good Practice in Counselling and Psychotherapy. The Framework draws attention to issues of confidentiality in discussing two key ethical principles: 'Fidelity' and 'Autonomy'.

### **FIDELITY: HONOURING THE TRUST PLACE IN THE PRACTITIONER**

Being trustworthy is regarded as fundamental to understanding and resolving ethical issues. Practitioners who adopt this principle: act in accordance with the trust placed in them; regard confidentiality as an obligation arising from the client's trust; restrict any disclosure of confidential information about clients to furthering the purposes for which it was originally disclosed.

### **AUTONOMY: RESPECT FOR THE PATIENTS RIGHT TO SELF-GOVERNING BODY**

This principle emphasises the importance of the patients commitment to participating in counselling or psychotherapy, usually on a voluntary basis. Practitioners who respect their patients autonomy - protect privacy; protect confidentiality; normally make any disclosures of confidential information conditional on the consent of the person concerned.

### **ETHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR GOOD PRACTICE IN COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY BACP 2001/2002 P3**

The counsellors, therapists and psychologists do not normally divulge information about whether or not a self-referred patient has attended counselling, or what was discussed within a session, to any third party: fellow client, doctor, member of staff or parent. Sometimes a counselling patient requests that information is passed on (for example, if a 'medical certificate equivalent' is needed for a tutor), or the counsellor, therapist or psychologist feels that it might be helpful to communicate with another person, such as a doctor. In these circumstances, the counsellor, therapist or psychologist would discuss with the patient the nature and form of such a communication and obtain their explicit permission (usually by asking them to sign an Exchange of Confidential Information Form).

All the counsellors, therapists and psychologists attend counselling supervision and team meetings in which cases are discussed, but the identity of patients is disguised. Counsellors may also discuss cases with the psychiatric consultant to the Counselling Service on a similar basis. The counsellor, therapist or psychologist keeps records for statistical purposes, and individual notes, which are held securely. Any patient who would like to see their notes can discuss this with their counsellor, therapist or psychologist.

The BACP Framework acknowledges that in some circumstances, particularly where a client may be at risk of serious self-harm, or harm to others, a counsellor may face a dilemma about whether or not to breach confidentiality;

In reaching such a decision, the counsellor, therapist or psychologist would attempt to assess the severity and immediacy of the risk involved, and to distinguish between, for example, violent intent and violent fantasy. As the Framework indicates, any decision to breach confidentiality would normally be discussed with a supervisor, psychiatric consultant or experienced colleague.

In deciding whether or not to breach confidentiality the counsellor will also consider where to pass on information, on a 'need to know' basis. In the case of a suicidal client, for example, this will usually be a doctor or other medical professional. If a client were posing a threat to the safety of others, it might be necessary to involve the police. The BACP Framework is clear that any breaking of confidentiality should be done in a careful and controlled way:

'In all cases, the aim should be to ensure for the client a good quality of care that is as respectful of the client's capacity for self-determination and their trust as circumstances permit.'

### **ETHICAL FRAMEWORK FOR GOOD PRACTICE IN COUNSELLING AND PSYCHOTHERAPY BACP 2001/2003 P6**

There may be occasions where an individual is behaving in a way that others find disturbing, but unless the counsellor, therapist or psychologist feels that their patient is a risk to self or others, they will not pass on information about them. Although counsellors, therapists or psychologists will not discuss individual patients without their permission, the Service is happy to accept referrals who are concerned about an individual.

The Counselling Service appreciates the extent to which our clients respect this policy on confidentiality, even if they can sometimes find it frustrating. The Service hopes that this statement clarifies the thinking behind its approach, and the counsellors, therapists or psychologists are happy to discuss particular issues relating to this. The counsellor, therapist or psychologist believes that it is in the interests of the community to have a Counselling Service that offers patients a promise that confidentiality will be maintained in all but the exceptional circumstances discussed in this document. We understand how important it is to keep your personal information safe and secure and we take this very seriously. We have taken steps to make sure your personal information is looked after in the best possible way and we review this regularly.

**Please read our GDPR Privacy Policy carefully, as it contains important information about how we use the personal and healthcare information we collect on your behalf.**

**STATEMENT UPDATED ON FRIDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> APRIL 2020 NEXT REVIEW DATE ON SATURDAY 3<sup>RD</sup> APRIL 2021**