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INFORMATION FOR NEW CLIENTS (updated 6/23/10)

Welcome to Footsteps Counseling! Below you will find information regarding my practice and policies. You can find more info at www.footstepscounseling.net. Please bring the Client Information form and your insurance card with you to your appointment. When you arrive, have a seat in the waiting area of Suite 303. I look forward to meeting with you!

Professional Information

I received a B.A. in psychology from the University of Alabama in Huntsville and a M.S. in Counseling psychology from Alabama A&M University. I am a Licensed Professional Counselor in AL and a National Certified Counselor by the National Board of Certified Counselors.

Benefits and Risks in Counseling

Participation in therapy can result in many benefits including improved mood, better relationships and resolution of the concerns that led to seeking therapy. Counseling can be fun and exciting and, at times, painful and difficult. During therapy, you may experience sadness, anger or other distressing emotions, usually only temporary. Counseling can lead to changes in your perspectives and can affect your decisions, relationships and understanding of yourself. Also, therapy is not always successful; there is no guarantee that therapy will yield positive or intended results.

Confidentiality

In general, information shared in therapy will remain confidential and only be released with your written permission. Some exceptions include: if there is a suspicion of abuse; if you are a danger to yourself or others; if information has been court-ordered; if you are involved in criminal proceedings; and if information is required to collect payment. If a client threatens harm to him/herself or others, I may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her, contact family members, emergency contacts, potential victims and/or the police. During an unexpected absence, it may be necessary for someone else to contact you. This person will have signed a confidentiality agreement beforehand. I do not voluntarily become involved in legal proceedings. Doing so would require me to release clients' private information. Thus, I ask you to agree to not involve me in legal matters. If you feel that you may be involved in legal matters, I recommend that you hire the services of a mental health professional who has expertise in areas of litigation.

Termination

Ideally, therapy ends when client's goals have been met. However, you have the right to terminate therapy at any time. I reserve the right to postpone or terminate therapy at my discretion. Reasons I may do so include: untimely payment of fees, conflicts of interest, failure to comply with treatment recommendations or practice policies, excessive cancellations or no-shows, if you come to a session under the influence of drugs/alcohol, if your needs are outside my scope of practice or if you are not making progress in therapy.

Sessions and Cancellation Policy

The initial assessment usually lasts 60 minutes, and regular sessions last 45-50 minutes. If you arrive late for an appointment, that time is lost, and you will still be responsible for the full fee of the session. Sessions are usually scheduled on a weekly basis initially and then often less frequently as progress is made. The total length of time spent in counseling varies with each client and their needs.

If you need to cancel or reschedule an appointment, a 24 hour notice by phone is requested. If you cancel an appointment with less than a 24 hour notice, you may be charged a \$25 cancellation fee. If you miss an appointment with no notice, you may be charged a \$50 missed appointment fee.

Fees

Standard fees are \$125 for the initial assessment and \$100 for regular sessions. Self-pay rates are \$75 for the initial and regular sessions. I offer reduced rates on a limited basis. Unless otherwise agreed, the fee is \$100 hourly for other services requested by the client or performed on the client's behalf including but not limited to: longer sessions, report writing and reading, attendance at meetings, travel time, consultations with other professionals (phone and in-person) and authorized release of information. In most cases, fees are due prior to the service being rendered. The fee is \$25 for

returned checks and \$150 hourly for preparation and attendance at legal proceedings.

If you need to contact me between sessions, I will gladly return your call or respond to emails. Please be advised that the standard fee is \$100 hourly (pro-rated) for phone calls and email reading/response time regarding treatment and other non-administrative issues. Generally, I rarely charge for such contact, especially if it is brief and infrequent. However, if contact outside of sessions becomes more lengthy and frequent, I may charge for my time. Please note that insurance companies do not pay for additional services, and you will be responsible for these charges.

Insurance

I am a provider for many insurance companies. I will file your claims for you or give you the forms to file on your own if you prefer. Insurance plans vary widely in their terms and coverage. While I attempt to verify benefits prior to your session, I am not always able to do so. Therefore, I strongly recommend that you call your insurance company prior to your first appointment in order to verify coverage. Some insurance companies will not pay for services unless they have authorized it beforehand. If this is the case, you will need to obtain this authorization. An authorization of services by your insurance company does not guarantee payment. There are times when insurance denies or delays payment for various reasons. Any balance not paid by your insurance company within 90 days for any reason will become your responsibility. You will be responsible for your copay and unmet deductibles.

Insurance vs Paying out of Pocket

While insurance may pay for a part of your treatment, there are some disadvantages when using insurance. Clients need to be informed before beginning counseling so that they can make the best decision for themselves and/or their family. Insurance companies require me to provide a **mental health diagnosis**. This diagnosis will become part of your permanent health record and may be considered when you apply for employment, security clearances, loans, credit, life insurance or other insurance policies. You lose **privacy** as the insurance company will have access to your treatment information. Insurance companies often place **restrictions** on treatment. They may only cover treatment for conditions they deem to be medically necessary. They may only authorize a limited number of sessions and may only pay if the treatment approach used is considered brief and crisis-oriented. If you wish to avoid health insurance, you have the option of paying for services out of pocket. Benefits in paying out of pocket include: you maintain your privacy; you/your child will avoid a record of a mental health diagnosis; and you have control of your treatment.

Payments

All fees are due at the time of service unless otherwise agreed and are requested at the beginning of sessions. Payments can be made by cash; by check to Footsteps Counseling; or by credit card. Payments can also be made online at www.footstepscounseling.net. Please have checks ready before your session begins. If you prefer to pay online, please do so before arriving for your appointment. If you arrive for a session without payment, your session may be shortened or postponed pending payment. If your balance has not been paid within 90 days, I may use a collection agency or small claims court in efforts to collect payment. You may be charged a collections fee in addition to your balance. If you feel as if you may have trouble with payments, please let me know so we can discuss possible solutions.

Contact and Emergencies

My phone number is (256) 655-6762. If I am unavailable when you call, please leave a message. I make every effort to return calls within the same day. Messages left after 5:00 pm will be returned the next business day. My email address is christie@footstepscounseling.net. Email is a great way to reach me and will often result in the quickest response. My mailing address is PO Box 6702 Huntsville, AL 35813. My website is www.footstepscounseling.net. Please be advised that I am unable to provide 24-hour assistance. If you feel that you or your child is experiencing an emergency or cannot safely wait for me to return your call, you should seek help immediately by calling 911 or going to the nearest Emergency Room.

Counseling with Minors

Parents/guardians have a right to information about their child's treatment. However, for therapy to be most helpful, minors need to know that they can talk freely and privately. For this reason, I only discuss general themes and progress with parents and keep specific discussions shared by the child in confidence. However, if I feel that the child's safety is in jeopardy or if the child expresses an intent to harm himself or others, I will attempt to notify the parent immediately.

A parent or guardian who has legal authority must be the one to consent to the minor's treatment. Please note that AL law states that minors 14 years or older are able to consent to treatment for him/herself. A parent/guardian must bring the minor to sessions and is asked to remain in the waiting area during the session in case their presence is needed.