

Informed Consent & Professional Disclosure Agreement for Counseling

with Alyce E. Wellons, LCSW

Welcome to my counseling practice! I am looking forward to working together with you to help you create and explore your possibilities for change.

It is important to me that you know how we will work together. I believe our work will be most helpful to you when you have a clear idea of what we are trying to do. This document is intended to provide answers to some questions clients often ask about that process.

Included in this document is general information about:

- Risks and benefits of counseling
- Goals of our work together and what my methods of counseling are like
- Length of counseling
- How much my professional services cost and how I handle money matters
- Other important areas of our relationship

After you read this document, we can discuss how these issues apply to your own situation. Please read all of it and ask me about any parts that are not clear to you. Write down any questions you think of, and we will discuss them before we agree to meet for our first session, either in person or online. After reading and fully understand this document, please sign this..

My Credentials & Work Experience

I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker with 16 years of experience in the field of clinical social work. I currently have my own practice for the general practice of clinical practice and psychotherapy. I am trained and experienced in providing psychotherapy individually, with couples, families, and in groups with adults and adolescents. Earlier in my career, I worked in non profit agencies serving different populations from HIV to homeless substance abuse as well as long term inpatient and outpatient treatment centers for addictive and psychiatric disorders. I hold these qualifications:

- I earned my license as a Clinical Social Worker in Georgia in 1999.
- I earned my license as a Master Social Worker in Georgia in 1995.
- I have a Masters Degree in Social Work from the Clark Atlanta University
- I completed training to meet all requirements as a licensed master clinical social worker in Georgia.
- I completed an advanced practicum training (internship) in counseling at Positive Impact in Atlanta, Georgia, Fayette Counseling Center in Fayetteville, Georgia and an externship at Jewish Family and Children Services in Atlanta, Georgia.
- I have completed the 8 week training in Mindfully Based Stress Reduction (MBSR)
- I am a Certified Imago Therapist (www.grits.org)
- I have completed 2 introductory courses on the integration of yoga with psychotherapy as a treatment for depression and anxiety.

- I have completed a year long peer lead self study of Brene Brown's work "Connections, a 12 week Psychoeducational Shame Resilience Curriculum.
- I have in depth, long term training in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of addiction from over 15 years of working in inpatient and outpatient treatment settings, ongoing continuing education, and presenting on the various aspects of addiction.
- I provide consultation, continuing education and am a frequent presenter and member of panels at various institutions and settings thru out Georgia including Emory University, National Association of Social Workers: Georgia Chapter, Georgia Society for Clinical Social Work, Skyland Trail, Foundations and Talbott Recovery Campus.
- I am a regular contributor of articles to my professional newsletter, The Clinical Page (www.gscsw.org).
- I completed training to meet all requirements as a licensed master social worker in Georgia.
- I am a professional member of the Georgia Society for Clinical Social Work
- I am a professional member of Society for the Integration of Spirituality in Psychotherapy.
- I am a professional member of the Georgia Society for Clinical Social Work (www.gscsw.org); I am a 2 term Past President of this organization, as well as past Secretary, past Editor of the newsletter, The Clinical Page, and past Mentorship co-leader.

An Explanation of the Levels of Licensing in Georgia

The practice of licensed or registered persons in the field of psychotherapy is regulated in the State of Georgia by the Georgia Composite Board of Professional Counselors, Social Workers, and Marriage and Family Therapists. The Georgia Composite Board can be reached at 237 Coliseum Drive, Macon, GA, 31217-3858. Their phone number is (478) 207-2440.

Not all "psychotherapists" in Georgia have formal training, degrees, or clinical experience. The minimum standards required by Georgia to call yourself a "mental health professional" are as follows:

- A Licensed Clinical Social Worker, a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist, and a Licensed Professional Counselor must hold a Master's Degree in their respective disciplines and have at least two or three years of post-Master's clinical supervision, depending on the discipline.
- A Licensed Master Social Worker must hold a Master's degree in social work and have completed a licensing examination.
- A Licensed Psychologist must hold a Doctorate degree in psychology and have one year of post-doctoral clinical supervision.
- A Psychologist Candidate, a Marriage and Family Therapist Candidate, and a Master Social Worker must hold the necessary licensing degree and be in the process of completing the required supervision for licensure.
- A Certified Addiction Counselor I (CAC I) must be a high school graduate, and complete required training hours and 1,000 hours of supervised experience.
- A CAC II must complete additional required training hours and 2,000 hours of supervised experience.

- A CAC III must have a Bachelor's Degree in behavioral health and complete additional required training hours and 2,000 hours of supervised experience.

What To Expect From Our Relationship

As a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, I will use my best knowledge and skills to help you. This includes following the standards of the National Association of Social Workers, or NASW. In your best interests, the NASW puts limits on the relationship between a therapist and a client, and I will abide by these. Let me explain these limits, so you will not think they are personal responses to you.

First, I am licensed and trained to practice counseling – not law, medicine, finance, or any other profession. I am not able to give you good advice from these other professional viewpoints.

Second, the state laws and the rules of the NASW require me to keep what you tell me confidential. You can trust me not to tell anyone else what you tell me, except in certain limited situations. I explain what those are in the "About Confidentiality" section of this document. Here I want to explain that I try not to reveal who my clients are. This is part of my effort to maintain your privacy. If we meet on the street or in a social setting, I will not approach you or say "hello." My behavior will not be a personal reaction to you, but a way to maintain the confidentiality of our relationship. You are welcome to approach me, however. I will understand completely if you choose not to approach me!

Third, in your best interest, and following the NASW's standards, I can only be your therapist. I cannot have any other role in your life. In a professional relationship, sexual intimacy is never appropriate and should be reported to the Georgia Composite Board. I cannot, now or ever, be a close friend or socialize with you. Except for the situations I have described above, I will always maintain your privacy. I also ask you not to disclose the name or identity of any other client being seen in this office.

I make every effort to keep the names and records of clients private. I will try never to use your name on the telephone, if clients in the office can overhear it.

If your records need to be seen by another professional or anyone else, I will discuss it with you. If you agree to share these records, you will need to sign a form consenting to such disclosure. This form states exactly what information is to be shared, with whom, and why, and it also sets time limits. You may read this form at any time. And, you may rescind your permission to disclose information at any time. If you have questions about this process, please ask me.

It is my office policy to destroy clients' records 10 years after the end of our therapy. Until then, I will keep your records in a safe, locked place.

If I must discontinue our relationship because of death, illness, disability, or other presently unforeseen circumstances, I ask you to agree to permit me or my legal representative to transfer your records to another therapist of my choice who will assure the confidentiality, preservation, and appropriate access to your records. By signing this document, you are giving your consent to this request. This only means this therapist will keep your records secure.

If we engage in family or couple therapy (where there is more than one client), and you want to have records of our work together sent to anyone, all of the adults present must provide written consent before any information will be released to any third party.

Working Together

Because you will be putting a good deal of time, money, and energy into counseling, you should choose a therapist carefully. I strongly believe you should feel comfortable with the therapist you choose, and hopeful about the work ahead of you. Research shows that when you feel this way, you drastically increase the probability of therapy being helpful to you. Let me describe how I see our work together.

My approach to psychotherapy is influenced by different theoretical perspectives including relational, psychodynamic and attachment theories. I also have training in various different treatment modality including CBT (Cognitive Behavioral Therapy), MBSR (Mindfully Based Stress Reduction) DBT (Dialectical Behavioral Therapy) and integrate those into the psychotherapy process. I believe strongly in the collaboration of client and therapist in assessing and planning the course of psychotherapy together. My practice has room for clients seeking long term psychotherapy as well as those wanting shorter term work. I have specialized training in couples psychotherapy influenced by the work of Imago, John Gottman and Sue Johnson (attachment based). I also have in depth, long term training in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of addiction.

In our work together, you may find that I use both developing and research-based technologies. Technologies are those that may be newer and, in my professional opinion, show promise, such as email, video sessions, phone sessions, chat and online journaling; they have gained strong bodies of research to support and verify their effectiveness. The more established research-based technologies that I use are those which have been in existence long enough to support with clients who have goals similar to yours. Ultimately, my clinical practice is focused on your possibilities – possibilities for healing, possibilities for growth, possibilities for change, possibilities for learning, possibilities for insight and possibilities for understanding.

The most central ideas in my work include the following:

- Many problems arise due to our issues with connection and attachment. Some of these issues may be related back to our earliest attachment figures and our relationships during those formative years, how they influenced us in making the decisions we make today.
- Most people seek psychotherapy because they are experiencing problems in a relationship or at work. As Freud said "Love and work, work and love, that is all there is."
- Most of our problems arise from discomfort, or our difficulty identifying, tolerating and accepting discomfort.
- I believe one of the central goals is learning to tolerate what feels intolerable, and make what is unconscious conscious. This is the central work of psychotherapy.
- The strength and meaning is the collaboration between client and therapist in identifying what is uncomfortable and unconscious, discovering the barriers to change, and using the different treatment modalities to remove those barriers.

- The collaborative work helps us both assess and plan for creating solutions and positive changes. This creates an empowerment and a strength in moving forward in life with tools you can use ongoing.

Courage and Commitment

Counseling is not like visiting a medical doctor for a simple procedure. It requires your courage and commitment to this work, which may take some time. I will ask you many questions such as "what is important to you," "what do certain experiences mean to you," "what strong feelings are involved," and "what choices you do want to make?" Our work together requires your best efforts to change thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. This is one of the ways that you are an active partner in counseling.

We will plan our work together --- the areas to work on, our goals, the methods we will use, commitments we will make, and many other things. We will agree on a plan that we will both work hard to follow. We will continuously look together at our progress and goals. If we think we need to, we can change our plan at any time.

I want you to be able to create steps toward success without me. I encourage you to learn more about the things that we will talk about. I may email articles for you to read or recommend books to help you understand more about the tasks that we undertake. And, I may ask you to keep a journal on your own about our work together. Your journal will be for your eyes only unless you wish to share it with me.

How To Make The Most of Our Work Together

I sometimes take notes during our meetings. You may find it useful to take your own notes in session.

An important part of your therapy will be practicing new skills that you will learn in our sessions. I will ask you to practice outside our time together and we will work to set up homework assignments for you. I might ask you to do exercises, to keep records, and perhaps to do other tasks to deepen your learning. You will probably have to work on relationships in your life and make long-term efforts to get the best results.

These are important parts of personal change. Change will sometimes be easy and quick, but sometimes it will be slow and frustrating, and you will need to keep trying. There are no instant, painless cures and no "magic pills." However, you can learn new ways of looking at your situation that will be very helpful for changing how you feel and how you react.

Frequency of Sessions

When we meet for our initial consultation appointment, we will decide together the beginning plan of your course of therapy. We will decide together the frequency of sessions as well as

when to change the frequency, when to take breaks, and when to end the therapy. Initially, clients begin the process coming to therapy weekly or every other week. After a period of time to be decided by us together, we may choose to change frequency by coming less or adding sessions in as needed. Some clients come for longer courses of psychotherapy, up to 10+ years, while others come for a few sessions. The collaboration between the 2 of us will help you decide what you need as we proceed. The process of ending is called termination. The recommendation is that if you/we/I decide to take a break from therapy or end therapy for whatever reason, we sit down together, go over why and review the work that has been done, the reason for terminating, and any recommendations.

I may send you a brief set of questions through email about 6 months after our last session. These questions will ask you to look back at our work together; sending them to you is part of my duty as a therapist. I ask that you agree, as part of entering therapy with me, to return this follow-up form and to be very honest about what you tell me then.

Limits of The Counseling Relationship – What Every Client Should Know

Counseling is a professional service I can provide to you. Because of the nature of counseling, our relationship has to be different from most relationships. It may differ in how long it lasts, in the topics we discuss, or in the goals of our relationship. It must also be limited to the relationship of therapist and client only. If we were to interact in any other ways, we would then have a "dual relationship," which would not be right and may not be legal. The different therapy professions have rules against such relationships to protect us both.

I want to explain why having a dual relationship is not a good idea. Dual relationships can set up conflicts between my own (the therapist's) interests and your (the client's) best interests, and then your interests might not be put first. In order to offer all my clients the best care, my judgment needs to be unselfish and professional at all times.

Because I am your therapist, dual relationships like these are improper:

- I cannot be your supervisor, teacher, or evaluator.
- I cannot be a counselor to my own relatives, friends (or the relatives of friends), people I know socially or business contacts.
- I cannot provide counseling to people I used to know socially, or to former business contacts.
- I cannot have any other kind of business relationship with you besides the counseling itself. For example, I cannot employ you, lend to or borrow from you or trade or barter your services (things like tutoring, repairing, child care, etc.) or goods in exchange for counseling.
- I cannot give legal, medical, financial, or any other type of professional advice.
- I cannot have any kind of romantic or sexual relationship with a former or current client, or any other people close to a client.

There are important differences between counseling and friendship. As your therapist, I cannot be your friend. Friends may see you only from their personal viewpoints and experiences. Friends may want to find quick and easy solutions to your problems so that 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 counselor offers you choices and helps you choose what is best for you. A counselor helps you learn how to solve problems better and make better decisions. A counselor's responses to your situation are based on tested theories and methods of change. You should also know that counselors are required to keep their clients' identities secret. Therefore, I may ignore you when we meet in a public place, and I must decline to attend your family's gatherings if you invite me. Lastly, when our counseling is completed, I will not be able to be a friend to you.

In sum, my duty as a counselor is to care for you and my other clients, but only in the professional role of counselor.

The Benefits and Risks of Therapy

As with any powerful treatment, there are risks as well as benefits associated with therapy. You should think about both the benefits and risks when making any treatment decisions. For example, in therapy, there is a risk that clients will, for a time, have uncomfortable levels of anxiety, sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, helplessness, or other negative feelings. Clients may recall unpleasant memories. These feelings or memories may bother a client at work or in school. In addition, some people in your community may mistakenly view anyone in therapy as weak, or perhaps as seriously disturbed or even dangerous. Also, clients in therapy may have problems with people important to them. Family secrets may be told. Therapy may disrupt a significant relationship and sometimes may even lead to a divorce. Sometimes, too, a client's problems may temporarily worsen after the beginning of treatment. Most of these risks are to be expected when people are making important changes in their lives. Finally, even with our best efforts, there is a risk that therapy may not work out well for you.

While you should consider these risks, you should also know that the benefits of therapy have been supported by scientists in hundreds of well-designed research studies. People who are depressed may find their mood lifting. Others may no longer feel afraid, angry, or anxious. In therapy, you have an opportunity to talk things out fully until your feelings are relieved or the problems are solved. Your relationships and coping skills may improve greatly. You may get more satisfaction out of social and family relationships. Your personal goals and values may become clearer and more likely to be achieved.

My clients may grow in many directions – as individuals, in their personal relationships, in their career or academics, on their spiritual paths, and in the ability to enjoy their lives. While there is hope that improvement will occur as part of the therapeutic process, there is no guarantee. However, I do not accept clients into my practice that I do not think I can help. Therefore, I will enter our relationship with optimism about our progress.

If you could benefit from a treatment that I cannot provide, I will try to help you to get it. You have a right to ask me about other such treatments, their risks, and their benefits. Based on what I learn about your problems, I may recommend that you consult with a physician or other professional. If I do this, I will fully discuss my reasons with you, so that you can decide what is best. If you are treated by another professional, with your permission I will coordinate my services with them and with your own medical doctor.

If for some reason treatment is not going well, I may suggest that you see another therapist or another professional. As a responsible person and ethical therapist, I cannot continue to treat you if my treatment is not working for you. If you wish for another professional's opinion at any time, or wish to talk with another therapist, I can help you find a qualified person and will provide him or her with the information needed.

Use of Technology

It is important for you to know that these methods come with additional risks. These risks include but are not limited to the following:

- The possibility of technology failure resulting in messages / information not being received.
- The possibility of misunderstandings is increased with text-based modalities such as email or chat due to the absence of nonverbal / visual cues.
- Use of email may result in various servers creating permanent records of these transactions.
- Many employers and government agencies review email archives on a routine basis, record letters typed on a keyboard, and / or engage in data mining programs to identify transmissions containing specified content.
- My email and the online web portal is not checked daily and may result in a possible lag in turnaround / response.
- Confidentiality may be breached at many points when using electronic communication including unauthorized monitoring / interception of transmissions from your computer and my own; it may also be breached as the information passes through the servers along the route to each other. This means that it is possible that third parties may access your records / communication when you are using an unsecure service (such as gmail, hotmail, etc.)
- What is said online (except through the encrypted, secure online client portal) may be viewed by others.
- Assessment / diagnosis often becomes more difficult without the benefit of face-to-face contact.
- Your insurance may not cover technology-assisted distance counseling.
- Your insurance company may also consider our electronic communication (in all forms) to be part of the medical record and request them.
- I use a Hushmail email account for email communication, which is encrypted if you choose to use a Hushmail email account, too. If you don't use hushmail or another encrypted email service, that will mean that it is not an encrypted account, and is less secure; however, this is your decision.
- I recommend that you only use email communication for scheduling purposes.
- However, even encrypted email messages can be decoded by motivated hackers.

I cannot guarantee confidentiality when you and I are communicating via cell phone, fax, non-encrypted email, non-encrypted video or computer. These devices could compromise confidentiality. By understanding the inherent risks of the aforementioned devices, you can make an informed choice about when / where / how to use those tools.

Because you now have this knowledge of the risks related to the use of technology, I will assume that if you use any of these methods to contact me, you are giving me permission to do the same. Please note that I do not check email on a daily basis. Otherwise, for the reasons stated above I will only use email, cell phone, fax, email, or computer for therapeutic purposes and by doing so, understand and accept the associated risks. I agree to not tape or video record any in-person or online sessions, chats, or phone sessions, unless we agree to it being useful for treatment.

Confidentiality in Therapy

I will treat what you tell me with great care. My professional ethics (that is, my profession's rules about moral matters) and the laws of this state prevent me from telling anyone else what you tell me unless you give me written permission. These rules and laws are the ways our society recognizes and supports the privacy of what a therapist and client talk about – in other words, the “confidentiality” of therapy.

However, it is important for you to know that I cannot promise that everything you tell me will never be revealed to someone else. There are some times when the law requires me to tell things to others. There are also some other limits on our confidentiality. We need to review these because I want you to understand clearly what I can and cannot keep confidential. You need to know about these rules now, so that you don't tell me something as a “secret” that I cannot keep. These are very important issues, so please read these pages carefully and keep a copy for your records. At our next meeting, we can discuss any questions you might have about confidentiality.

When you or other persons are believed to be in physical danger, the law requires me to tell others about it. Specifically:

- If I come to suspect that you are threatening serious harm to another person, I am required to try to protect that person. I may have to tell the person and the police, or perhaps try to have you put in a hospital.
- If you seriously threaten or act in a way that is very likely to harm yourself, I may have to seek a hospital for you, or to call on your family members or others who can help protect you. If such a situation does come up, I will fully discuss the situation with you before I do anything, unless there is a very strong reason not to.
- In an emergency where your life or health is in danger, and I cannot get your consent, I may give another professional some information to protect your life. I will try to get your permission first, and I will discuss this with you as soon as possible afterwards.
- If I believe or suspect that you (or anyone) are abusing a child, an elderly person, or a disabled person, I must file a report with a state agency. To “abuse” means to neglect, hurt, or sexually molest another person. I do not have any legal power to investigate the situation to find out all the facts. The state agency will investigate. If this might be your situation, we should discuss the legal aspects in detail before you tell me anything about these topics. You may also want to talk to your lawyer.

In any of these situations, I would reveal only the information that is needed to protect you or the other person. I would not tell everything that you have told me.

In general, if you become involved in a court case or proceeding, you can prevent me from testifying in court about what you have told me. This is called "privilege," and it is your choice to prevent me from testifying or to allow me to do so. I usually have no legal or ethical duty to report a crime that occurred in the past or one that is imminent. However, there are some situations where the law, a judge or court may require me to report / testify. These include but may not be limited to the following:

- In any situations that involve the welfare of a child such as child abuse / neglect;
- In child custody or adoption proceedings, where your fitness as a parent is questioned or in doubt;
- In situations involving the physical violence exception of the "duty to warn and protect" statute;
- In cases where your emotional or mental condition is important information for a court's decision – including my duty to initiate a 72-hour hold for your evaluation because of imminent danger to yourself or others;
- During a malpractice case or an investigation of me or another therapist by a professional group;
- In a civil commitment hearing to decide if you will be admitted to or continued in a psychiatric hospital;
- When you are seeing me for court-ordered evaluations or treatment. In this case, we need to discuss confidentiality fully because you don't have to tell me what you don't want the court to find out through my report.

There are a few other things you must know about confidentiality and your work with me:

- I may sometimes consult with other professionals about your treatment. Those professionals will also be required by professional ethics and the law to keep your information confidential. Likewise, when I am out of town or unavailable, I may ask another therapist to be available to help you. I may give that professional some information about my clients.
- I am required to keep records of our work together, such as the notes I take when we meet. Legally, these records are mine, and I have sole ownership of them. You have a right to request that I review these records with me. If I believe that something in your clinical record might harm you, I may omit that information, but I will explain my reason to you.
- As a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, I am completely able to practice independently and am not required to be under supervision; however, to continue to improve my clinical skills, and to ensure that my clients are receiving the best care possible, I meet regularly with a group of Licensed Clinical Social Workers, Psychologists, and Psychiatrists for what is called a "supervision group". I may discuss elements of your treatment for what is called "case consultation", and will not reveal any personal information.

Confidentiality Concerning Money Matters and Insurance

- If you use your health insurance to pay a part of my fees, insurance companies require some information about our therapy. Insurers or managed care organizations

ask for much more information about you and your symptoms, as well as a detailed treatment plan.

- I will not send any statements or other information to your insurance company. I will only give such information to you. The statement, or invoice, is directly available to you at any time through the online web portal. That way, you can see what your insurance company will know about our therapy. It is against the law for insurers to release information about our office visits to anyone without your written permission. Although I believe the insurance company will act legally, I cannot control who sees this information at the insurer's office.
- If you have been sent to me by your employer's Employee Assistance Program, the program's staffers may require some information. Again, I hope that they will act legally, but I cannot control who sees this information at their offices. If this is your situation, let us fully discuss any agreement I may have with your employer or the program before we talk further.
- If your account with me is unpaid and we have not arranged a payment plan, I can use a collection agency or other legal means to get paid for my professional services.

Confidentiality With The Use of Technology

I use password protected computers with a full array of security software including anti-spam, anti-hacker, anti-malware, anti-ad as well as a robust firewall. The online video counseling is conducted in a private location, either at my office or my in-home office. I am only willing to do on-line video sessions and chat sessions with clients with whom I have already deemed appropriate for said services based on my clinical judgment. I also reserve my right to decide that video or chat services are no longer appropriate and end these services at any time.

To participate in online video counseling, you agree to be alone in a private room, to not tape or record sessions, and to use a computer that has Adobe flash player, a web cam and high speed internet connection. You are required to use security systems such as anti-virus, anti-malware, etc., to insure that your privacy is protected. Despite safeguards, absolute confidentiality and privacy cannot be guaranteed over the internet.

Special Technology Concerns

Online video counseling and online chat counseling has some unique challenges. I require that I all clients complete initial paperwork for my screening of their appropriateness for service, prior to beginning online video counseling. By law, a minor must have parental consent to participate in counseling. As such, part of informed consent is the acknowledgement that a person requesting counseling sessions is an adult. Should a minor wish for in-person or video counseling sessions, parental consent must be obtained through the parental consent form and at least one in-person contact with this clinician during the initial session.

Because there is always the possibility of technology failure and computer crashes, alternate modes of communication are recommended, but not required. Should power or technology failures occur, it is assumed counselor and client will reconnect once those failures have been rectified. I will contact you via phone to determine next steps.

Last, but by far not the least of concerns, is the issue of misunderstanding. Because written communication such as email and text is devoid of so many vocal and visual cues and clues, misunderstanding is possible. Every attempt is made to be as clear and straight forward as possible. Nevertheless, if a misunderstanding does occur, it will be up to the client and this counselor to work out the communication for clarity and understanding.

Confidentiality With Children and Families

When I treat clients between the ages of 11 and 18, I require that all legal parents who still have rights to the child be willing to consent to treatment prior to beginning treatment with a child or adolescent. I use my professional judgment to determine what information will remain confidential between the adolescent and myself and what information is appropriate to be shared with parents / guardians concerning treatment issues. However, parents / guardians do have the right to general information, including how therapy is going and dates of service. They need to be able to make well-informed decisions about therapy. The law may also require me to tell parents or guardians some information about other family members that I am told. This is especially true if these others' actions put the client or others in any danger.

In cases where I treat several members of a family (parents and children or other relatives), the confidentiality situation can become very complicated. I may have different duties toward different family members. At the start of our treatment, we must all have a clear understanding of our purposes and my role. Then we can be clear about any limits on confidentiality that may exist.

In couples counseling, if you tell me something your spouse or partner does not know, and not knowing this could harm him or her or your relationship, I cannot promise to keep it confidential. I have a "no secrets" policy when working with couples, and will not keep secrets. Please only tell me what you feel comfortable with your partner knowing. I will work with you to decide on the best long-term way to handle situations like this.

If you and your spouse have a custody dispute, or a court custody hearing is coming up, I will need to know about it. My professional ethics prevent me from doing both therapy and custody evaluations, so I choose to not do custody evaluations, and will refer you to a different counselor if you need this service.

If you are seeing me for couples counseling, you must agree at the start of treatment that if you eventually decide to divorce, you will not request my testimony for either side. The court, however, may order me to testify.

At the start of family treatment, we must also specify which members of the family must sign a release form for the common record I create in the therapy or therapies.

And, finally, Georgia state law prohibits all participants in couples / family therapy from disclosing any knowledge gained during the course of therapy without the consent of the person to whom the knowledge relates.

Confidentiality in Group Therapy

In group therapy, the other members of the group are not therapists. They do not have the same ethics and laws that I have to work under. You cannot be certain that they will always keep what you say in the group confidential. However, if you are a participant in group therapy, Georgia law requires you to NOT disclose any knowledge gained during the course of therapy without the consent of the person to whom the knowledge relates.

Other Information About Confidentiality

I will not record our therapy session on audiotape or videotape without your written permission.

If you want me to send information about our therapy to someone else, you must sign a "release of information" form. I have copies you can see, so you will know what is involved. I can provide this online or in person.

Any information that you also share outside of therapy, willingly and publicly, will not be considered protected or confidential by a court.

The laws and rules on confidentiality are complicated. Please bear in mind that I am not able to give you legal advice. If you have special or unusual concerns, and so need special advice, I strongly suggest that you talk to a lawyer to protect your interests legally and to act in your best interests.

About Our Appointments

I am available to work with you at regularly scheduled appointment times. If you wish, I will be happy to reserve a regular standing appointment time for you into the foreseeable future. The very first time I meet with you, we will need to give each other much basic information. Most clients usually meet with me for a 50 minute session once a week for a while, and gradually taper off to less frequent appointments. Some clients choose to meet with me for extended 75 minute sessions, or even twice weekly. Some clients prefer more intensive therapy up to several hours per week, several times per week. We can schedule meetings for both your convenience and based on what works best towards meeting your goals.

An appointment is a commitment to our work together. We both agree to meet and to be on time. If I am ever unable to start on time, it will most likely be due to an emergency and I ask for your understanding. I assure you that you will receive the full time agreed to. If you are late, we will probably be unable to meet for the full time, because it is likely that I will have another appointment after yours.

Cancellation Policy

I make every effort to accommodate as many clients as possible during the limited time I have available during the week. For that reason, it is necessary to have a cancellation policy that is fair and reasonable for all concerned. I will consider our meetings very important and ask you to do the same. Your session time is reserved only for you.

Please try not to miss sessions if you can possibly help it. A cancelled appointment delays our work. When you must cancel, please give me at least 24 hours notice by telephone or email. I do not check email every day, so this is not the best way to cancel or reschedule. I am rarely able to fill a cancelled session unless I know at least 24 hours in advance. If you are unable to provide at least 24 hours notice when you cancel, you will be charged the full fee for your session unless I am able to fill it with another client. You should note that insurance companies will not typically reimburse for missed appointments. The only time I will waive this fee is in the first event of serious or contagious illness, extreme weather, family or personal emergency. I reserve the right to decide whether or not I will waive my fee.

Fees, Payments and Billing

Payment for services is an important part of any professional relationship. This is even truer in therapy; one treatment goal is to make relationships and the duties and obligations they involve clear. You are fully responsible for seeing that my services are paid in full. Meeting this responsibility shows your commitment and maturity.

It is my policy to keep a credit card on file to be used for payment, late cancellations, or other types of professional services rendered. I accept Visa, MasterCard, American Express, or Discover. I will bill your card on file as soon as the end of each session. This prevents you from having a past-due balance and keeps our therapeutic relationship free of financial tension. You may choose to use a different form of payment, including check.

You will be given at least 30 days notice in advance if my fees should change. My current regular fees are as follows:

Regular therapy services: For all 50 minute sessions, either in person, online video, or phone, my fees are \$150. For all 75 minute sessions, my fees are \$225. For all 1 hour, 40 minute sessions, my fees are \$300. Other payment or fee arrangements must be worked out before our first meeting.

For scheduled sessions, if you have not arrived within fifteen minutes of the scheduled appointment and there has been no ability to connect with an outreach attempt, the session will be treated as a cancellation without 24 hour notification.

Should your account become 60 days past due and arrangements for payment have not been agreed upon, I have the right to use legal means (collection agency or court system) to secure payment. In this event, I respect client's confidentiality and only release a client's name, the dates and nature of services provided and the dollar amount due.

Telephone consultations / appointments: I believe that telephone consultations may be suitable or even needed at times in our therapy. If so, I will charge you our regular fee, prorated over the time needed. If I need to have telephone communication that extends beyond 10 minutes with you or outside professionals as part of your treatment, you will be billed for these at the same rate as for regular therapy services. My telephone fee rate is \$2 per minute. If you are concerned about this policy, please be sure to discuss it with me in advance so we can set a policy that is comfortable for both of us. Of course, there is no charge for brief calls less than 10 minutes related to scheduling and cancelling of appointments.

Hospital visits / Consultation with other professionals: \$150 per hour. Appointments at alternative locations such as hospitals and other therapist offices will be based on travel time, portal to portal, and the time involved in providing the required service at my regular fee schedule. Some services may require payment in advance.

I realize that my fees involve a substantial amount of money, although they are well in line with similar professionals' charges. For you to get the best value for your money, we must work hard and well.

I will assume that our agreed-upon fee-paying relationship will continue as long as I provide services to you. I will assume this until you tell me in person, by telephone, or by certified mail that you wish to end it. You have a responsibility to pay for any services you receive before you end the relationship.

Because I expect full payment at the time of our meetings, I usually do not send bills. If you wish, I will provide a "superbill" receipt at the conclusion of each session. That statement can be used for health insurance claims, as described in the next section.

If you think you may have trouble paying your fees on time, please discuss this with me. If this occurs, I will also raise the matter with you so we can arrive at a solution. If there is any problem with my charges, my billing, your insurance, or any other money-related point, please bring it to my attention. I will do the same with you. Such problems can interfere greatly with our work. They must be worked out openly and quickly.

If your bill remains unpaid for an excessive amount of time, I am required to suspend therapy with you. Fees that continue unpaid after this may be turned over to small-claims court or a collection service. In the event that it is necessary to commence proceedings to collect money owed for professional services rendered, you will be expected to pay reasonable collection costs and fees incurred, including but not limited to attorney's fees.

Managed Care and Your Therapy Choices

I have made the choice not to contract with Insurance companies, also called "Managed Care Companies" (MCC), for my professional services. Listed below you will find my thoughts concerning this decision.

Conflicts of Interest – As a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, I am required to avoid potential conflicts of interest. My primary concern is for your well-being. Therapists working under the constraints of MCC are sometimes put in the position of having to choose between what is in their own best interest and what is in their client's best interest.

Managed Care Companies were created to "manage" and contain escalating healthcare costs. Their bottom line is to reduce costs and raise profits; it is not to increase the quality of care or quality of life for you. In many cases, therapists who contract with MCC are actually paid to NOT see clients.

Restricted Choice --- Often MCC restrict your choice of therapist by offering only short term / brief therapy that I refer to as "drive-by" therapy which meets the financial criteria of MCC but may fail to afford you the opportunity to get the information / therapy that you want / need. It is my belief that this often results in your quality of care being compromised. This, of course, can result in the possibility of your needs going unmet.

Managed Care Companies often choose to limit what therapies are offered, restrict what is discussed in therapy, and decide which clients can be seen and for how long. Some MCC have even included "gag clauses" in their contracts to prevent therapists from suggesting more effective (sometimes more expensive) treatments

Professional Expertise --- I believe that you should be able to access the full range of mental health professionals according to your needs. Often MCC restrict the professionals that you are allowed to work with --- preferring to refer you to therapists who have a record of providing short term therapy rather than to other therapists who may provide better results or offer a different packaging of services.

Contractual Limitations – I believe that you have the right to full disclosure of any arrangements, agreements or restrictions between any third party and me that could interfere with or impact your treatment. Managed Care Companies may label counselors' choices to advocate for clients in this manner as "Managed Care Unfriendly Behaviors" and take such actions as they deem fit. Typically "violations" such as these result in therapists being removed from provider panels or censured in other ways.

Privacy / Confidentiality – By contracting with MCC, it is likely that I would be required to share your deeply personal information with gatekeepers and utilization review professionals; it would mean potentially allowing literally hundreds of other to have access to your personal information.

Medication – Research has consistently shown that medication for problems with mood is most effective when combined with psychotherapy. Nevertheless, MCC frequently approve medication only for their members rather than permitting them to also work with a mental health counselor. Again, the appearance is that of being more concerned about money rather than my client's needs.

Time – Managed Care Companies usually require therapists to justify and convince Utilization Review members before treatment is approved / continued. This is time consuming for the therapist and for the client who is required to continue her therapy in "fits and starts."

Diagnosis and Stigma – Managed Care Companies typically cover only those services deemed "medically necessary" which is defined as being literally about life and death and the treatment of illness. This means that they require a diagnosis of mental illness for my clients.

My practice is solution-focused on your quality of life and your desires. We spend our time talking about prevention, personal growth, and exploration rather than simply survival.

If You Choose To File On your Insurance, Traditional (or Indemnity) Health Insurance Plan, or Opt to Go Out of Network

Because I am a Licensed Clinical Social Worker, many health insurance plans will help you pay for therapy and other services that I offer. Because health insurance is written by many different companies, I cannot tell you what your particular plan covers. Please read your plan's booklet under coverage for "Outpatient Psychotherapy" or under "Treatment of Mental and Nervous Conditions." Or, call your employer's benefits office to find out what you need to know.

If your health insurance will pay part of my fee, I can help you with your insurance claim forms. However, please keep two things in mind:

1. I have no role in deciding what your insurance covers. Your employer decided which, if any, services will be covered and how much you will be reimbursed. You are responsible for checking your insurance coverage, deductibles, payment rates, co---payments, and so forth. Your insurance contract is between you and your company; it is not between me and the insurance company.
2. You – not your insurance company or any other person or company – are responsible for paying the fees we agree upon. I do not bill insurance companies for your reimbursement or my fees. I require my payment to come directly from you.

To seek payment from your insurance company, you must first obtain a claim form from your employer's benefits office or call your insurance company. Complete the claim form. Then attach my statement to the claim form and mail it to your insurance company. My statement already provides the information asked for on the claim.

My Contact Info

**Alyce E. Wellons, LCSW
675 Seminole Avenue
Suite 310 Atlanta, GA 30307**

**ph: 404.664.3110
alycewellons@hushmail.com**

Although I may be in my office Monday through Thursday, I do not take phone calls when I am with a client. The best way to reach me is always by phone or email. You can always leave a message on my voice-mail and I will return your call as soon as I can. Generally, I will return messages within 24 hours except on non-working days (Friday, Saturday, Sunday) and holidays.

I do not provide crisis counseling and cannot promise that I will be available at all times. If you have an emergency or crisis, I encourage you to leave this message on my voice-mail. However, if you are in need of immediate support, after leaving a voice-mail for me, you or your family members should call one of the following:

- 911 or

- Dekalb County Mental Health office at 1-800-715-4225 or
- Georgia Crisis & Access line (1-800-715-4225)
- Fulton County Department of Mental Health office at (404) 730-1600
- www.befrienders.org

Divorce/ Custody Disputes

If you ever become involved in a divorce or custody dispute, I will not provide evaluations or expert testimony in court. You should hire a different mental health professional for any evaluations or testimony you require. This position is based on two reasons: (1) My statements will be seen as biased in your favor because we have a therapy relationship; and (2) the testimony might affect our therapy relationship, and I must put this relationship first. By signing this document, you are acknowledging your full understanding of and agreement to my position on this matter.

Statement of Principles and Complaints Procedures

It is my intention to fully abide by all the rules of the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and by those of my state licenses.

Problems can arise in our relationship, just as in any other relationship. If you are not satisfied with any area of our work, please raise your concerns with me at once. Our work together will be slower and harder if your concerns with me are not worked out. I will make every effort to hear any complaints you have and strive to seek solutions to them.

If you feel that I, or any other therapist, has treated you unfairly or has even broken a professional rule, please tell me. You can also contact the state or local counseling association and speak to the chairperson of the ethics committee. He or she can help clarify your concerns or tell you how to file a complaint.

In Georgia, the practice of both licensed and unlicensed persons in the field of mental health is regulated by a regulating body, the Georgia Professional Licensing Board, which includes two subsidiary boards: 1) Georgia Composite Board of Professional Counselors, Social Workers, and Marriage and Family Therapists, and 2) the Georgia State Board of Examiners of Psychologists. The Georgia Composite Medical Board is a separate regulating board under which Psychiatrists are regulated.

You may contact the Georgia Professional Licensing Board, the organization that licenses those of us in the independent practice of 1) professional counselors, clinical social workers, marriage and family therapists, or 2) psychologists at:

**Georgia Professional Licensing Board
Complaint Division
237 Coliseum Drive
Macon, GA 31217-3858
(478) 207-2440**

You may contact the Georgia Composite Medical Board that licenses independent practice of psychiatrists at:

**Georgia Composite Medical Board
Enforcement Unit
2 Peachtree Street, N.W., 36th Floor
Atlanta, Georgia 30303
(404) 657-6494 or (404) 656-1725**

In my practice as a therapist, I do not discriminate against clients because of any of these factors: age, gender, marital / family status, race, color, religious beliefs, ethnic origin, place of residence, veteran status, physical disability, health status, sexual orientation, or criminal record unrelated to present dangerousness.

This is a personal commitment, as well as being required by federal, state, and local laws and regulations. I will always take steps to advance and support the values of equal opportunity, human dignity, and racial/ethnic/cultural diversity. If you believe you have been discriminated against, please bring this matter to my attention immediately.

Your Rights As A Client In Therapy

1. You have the right to be informed about the qualifications of your therapist including education, experience, clinical certification(s), and license(s).
2. You have the right to receive an explanation of services offered including methods of therapy, the techniques used, your time commitments, fee scales, and billing policies prior to receipt of services.
3. You have the right to be informed of the limitations of the therapist's practice to special areas of expertise (e.g. career development, ethnic groups, etc.) or age group (e.g. children, adolescents, older adults, etc.).
4. You have the right to participate in identifying problems, setting goals and evaluating progress toward meeting them.
5. You have the right to know who to contact in an emergency.
6. You have the right to request a second opinion or seek a referral for a second opinion at any time.
7. You have the right to request that copies of medical records and reports be sent to other counseling professionals.
8. You have the right to end therapy at any time. The only thing you will have to do is to pay for any sessions you have already had. You may, of course, have problems with other people or agencies if you end counseling – for example, if you have been sent for therapy by a court.
9. You have the right to ask questions about the therapy techniques and strategies and be informed of your progress.
10. You have the right to contact the appropriate professional organization if you have doubts or complaints relative to the therapist's conduct.
11. You have the right not to allow the use of any therapy technique. If your therapist plans to use any unusual technique, she will tell you and discuss its risks and benefits with you.

Our Agreement

Informed Consent & Professional Disclosure Agreement for Alyce E. Wellons, LCSW

I, the client / guardian, have read, or have had read to me, and fully understand my rights / responsibilities detailed in this document, the informed consent and professional disclosure agreement. My signature below indicates that I have discussed those points I did not understand and have had my questions, if any, fully answered.

It is also my understanding that any of the points mentioned above can be discussed and may be open to change. If at any time during the treatment I have questions about any of the subjects discussed in this document, I can talk with this therapist about them and she will do her best to answer them.

I agree to abide by and act in accordance with the points covered in this document. I understand that by signing this agreement, I am acknowledging the circumstances under which Alyce E. Wellons, LCSW, is legally obligated to waive confidentiality.

I understand that after therapy begins I have the right to withdraw my consent to therapy at any time, for any reason. However, I will make every effort to discuss my concerns about my progress with you before ending therapy with you.

I hereby agree to the counseling terms before I begin a possible counseling relationship with Alyce E. Wellons, LCSW, (or to have a child in my custody enter therapy) and to cooperate fully and to the best of my ability, as shown by my signature below. I understand that no specific promises have been made to me by this therapist about the results of treatment, the effectiveness of the procedures used by this therapist, or the number of sessions necessary for therapy to be effective.

The signature of client below this line indicates his / her desire to waive the right to have this professional disclosure statement read out loud to him / her. It does not waive any rights other than this.

THANK YOU!

I truly appreciate the chance you have given me to be of professional service to you, and look forward to a successful relationship with you. If you are satisfied with my services as we proceed, I (like any professional) would appreciate you referring other people to me who might also be able to make use of my services.

Client Signature: _____ Date: _____

Client Signature: _____ Date: _____

Guardian Signature (if applicable) _____ Date: _____

Therapist Signature: _____ Date: _____