



Informed Written Consent for Services

Counselor: Mattie Sparks, MA, LSW

It is often said that initiating counseling is the hardest step. Initiating counseling demonstrates courage and commitment, which are qualities necessary to bring about positive change. Thank you for choosing Cornerstone Counseling to be a part of your self-care and growth process. We are committed to providing you with the best possible care. Today's appointment with Mattie Sparks, LSW, MA will take approximately 50 minutes. This document is intended to inform you of our policies, State and Federal Laws and your rights as a client. It serves as a contract between you and your counselor as you begin a therapeutic relationship together. All professional Social Workers are legally and ethically required to adhere to a code of ethics. The National Association of Social Workers' code of ethics is available upon request.

Counselor Qualifications

Mattie Sparks, LSW, MA has earned a Bachelor's Degree in Social Work from Mississippi University for Women, and a Master's Degree in Pastoral Counseling from Ashland University/Ashland Theological Seminary/Emerge Ministries. She is a Licensed Social Worker in the State of Ohio. She is under the supervision of Daniel J. Higgins, MA,LPCC-S. Mattie is a member of the American Association of Christian Counselors. Her clinical interests include but are not limited to relationships, mood and anxiety issues. She has experience in treating children, adolescents, adults, couples and families. The treatment approach she prefers is Cognitive Behavioral Therapy.

What to Expect

The counselor's job is to provide assessment and counseling and work conjointly with you to set treatment goals. It is true that counseling success depends on the client actively wanting to change. Counseling is not an exact science, and at times the counselor, in consultation with you, may need to revise the goals of treatment. Some assessment will be carried out at the time of intake, and other assessments may be added later for further clarification. Unless otherwise stated, all counseling sessions are 50 minutes long. Your counseling will end when you have received what you were seeking from counseling, when you have realized the maximum benefit from the services, or when you are not likely to benefit from counseling. Termination is mutually agreed upon; however, the ultimate decision might be made independently by either the counselor or the client, depending on the circumstances. You have a right to refuse any recommended services or modality of change, including the right to terminate therapy at any time.

If you have been mandated for treatment to this practice, you will be required to sign a Release of Information Form so your counselor and the practice can provide necessary information to the agency, parole officer, court or other official that mandated your treatment.

As a client in counseling, you are encouraged to participate actively and fully in your own treatment. Many counselors will assign take-home activities – for example, reading. You are encouraged to follow through with as many of these assignments as possible. In addition, keep your counselor apprised when you cannot complete out-of-session assignments so that the two of you can make a new plan. Also, if you feel you do not fully understand something, ask your counselor for clarification. Clients who take an active approach to their treatment are likely to make more therapeutic progress than those who are passive.

The use of drugs or alcohol before the counseling appointment is prohibited. If the counselor suspects any engagement, you will be sent home and billed for the entire session.

Risks & Benefits of Counseling

Before giving your consent for mental health services such as counseling, it is important that you are informed of possible risks and benefits of treatment. Counseling provides you with an opportunity to work with someone who is passionate about working with you to improve whatever set of circumstances brought you to therapy. Typical benefits from counseling can be: An improved ability to relate with others. A clearer understanding of self, values and goals. Increased academic productivity. An ability to deal with everyday stress. Taking personal responsibility for working with these issues may lead to greater growth. While no one can guarantee or promise a specific outcome, there are a number of positive outcomes that can result from both short-term and long-term counseling. The extent of benefits usually depends on such factors as the specific issues or difficulties you hope to address, the severity of your issues, how good a fit you and your counselor are, the goals you have set, and the degree to which you follow through with treatment (i.e., your readiness to make the needed changes, your expectations of counseling). It is also true that not every counselor is a good match for every client. Since the quality of the client-therapist relationship is critically important to your success, you and your therapist must be a good fit. If you do not think you and your therapist are working well together, let him or her know.

Like any healthcare service, there are also potential risks associated with counseling. During counseling, remembering or talking about unpleasant events, feelings, or thoughts can result in your experiencing considerable discomfort or strong feelings (such as anger, sadness, worry or fear), or experiencing anxiety, depression, insomnia, etc. Counseling may challenge some of your assumptions or perceptions, or pose different ways of looking at or thinking about or handling situations. Any of these changes can cause you to feel upset, angry, depressed, challenged or disappointed. Attempting to resolve issues that brought you to therapy in the first place may result in changes that were not originally intended. Therefore, it is most likely that you may feel worse before you feel better. This is temporary, and a normal part of the process towards personal growth and change.

Confidentiality

All counseling services are confidential as mandated by the law. There are few **exceptions to confidentiality** that you need to be aware of. The following are legal/ethical exceptions to confidentiality:

- Clear and imminent danger to self or others (i.e., potential violence to self or others, suicidal or homicidal intent/behavior, life-threatening behavior).
- Any abuse and/or neglect of minors, elderly, or developmentally disabled/mentally handicapped individuals.
- When a client provides written permission (Release of Information Form).
- If a judge mandates a release of information.
- If a client sues a counselor or makes false charges against a counselor.

Also, it is standard professional and ethical conduct of counselors to consult with other professionals in the field. Consultation allows a freedom to gain other professional perspectives and ideas concerning how to best help you reach your treatment goals. No identifying information is shared in such consultations unless a release has been obtained. In the event that the client's identity becomes known during the course of consultation both professionals are required to maintain the same standards of confidentiality. Case

consultation is conducted on an as-needed basis within Cornerstone. Outside professionals will be utilized only as needed.

Social Media Policy

Counselors are prohibited from engaging in a personal virtual relationship with individuals with whom they have a current counseling relationship.

Minor Clients

Minors (children or adolescents under the age of 18 years) and adults who have been adjudicated incompetent in a court of law do not have a legal right to enter into contracts; thus, the parents or guardian control their legal rights. At the same time, counselors have an ethical obligation to the clients themselves. Although parents and guardians have a legal right to know the contents of their children's counseling sessions, it is imperative to understand the critical nature confidentiality plays in the effectiveness of treatment. Therefore, in order to balance the ethical rights of clients to make choices, their capacity to give consent or assent to counseling, and the rights and responsibilities of parents or families to protect minor clients and make decisions on their behalf, we will establish a thorough understanding with all parties regarding the issue of confidentiality. A verbal/written informed consent of verbal and written informed consent agreements among counselors, their minor clients, and those parents of minors is utilized in order to avoid misunderstandings.

Litigation Limitations

Due to the nature of the therapeutic process and the fact that it often involves making a full disclosure with regard to many matters that may be of a confidential nature, it is agreed that should there be legal proceedings (such as, but not limited to, **divorce and custody disputes**, etc.), neither you (client) or anyone else acting on your behalf will call on Cornerstone to testify in court or at any other proceeding, nor will a disclosure of the psychotherapy records be requested and/or provided.

Emergencies

If an emergency situation for which the client or their guardian feels immediate attention is necessary and we are unable to return your call within 15 minutes, the client or guardian understand that they are to contact their local emergency room in the community (911) for those services. Your counselor will follow those emergency services with standard counseling and support to the client or the client's family. Other modes of emergency contacts include Firelands Counseling and Recovery Services or the 24/7 Counseling Hotline.

Firelands Counseling and Recovery Services
Counseling Hotline

419-483-6516
1-800-826-1306

Fees & Payments

Counseling is provided at our standard fee of \$110.00 per 55 minute clinical hour. The fee for the diagnostic assessment (initial session) is \$130.00. It is unique in that it is the intake evaluation. Most health insurance policies cover a certain percentage of outpatient counseling. It is your choice if you will want us to bill your insurance company. You are ultimately responsible to pay any balance that your insurance company may not cover. We realize that you may have special arrangements with a non-custodial parent for payment of medical bills; however, we do not bill third parties. You are responsible for the bill at the time services are rendered.

Each counseling session will begin on the hour (in some cases on the half-hour) and will end approximately fifty minutes later. If you are late for an appointment the session will be shortened as necessitated by the counselor's schedule. Cornerstone Counseling will attempt to meet your individual counseling needs; however due to the nature of presenting issues, schedules, caseloads, and/or anticipated length of treatment, your counselor may suggest and assist you with a referral to an appropriate agency for further treatment.

Minor clients: At times, it may be necessary to schedule appointments during school hours. We ask for your cooperation to provide the most timely treatment for you and your children. ***It is mandatory for treatment of children that we have proof of custody even if shared parenting is ordered.*** Failure to provide legal documents may result in the rescheduling of your appointment.

Cancellation Policies

Due to the strong demand for counseling services, we ask that you give us **at least 24 hours** notice of your intention to cancel any counseling appointment. Failure to show without notice, or same-day cancellations will result in the client being billed the **full amount** due Cornerstone for that session.

Records

Legally and ethically, we are required to keep records of all our interactions. Your counseling records are stored in a secure location and only authorized persons have access to those records. Legally, you have right to see all information generated between us. You must provide explicit permission for information to be revealed, unless the law specifies otherwise (see exceptions to confidentiality). Thus, with your written consent, we will provide information to anyone with legitimate need. You are also entitled to a copy of any records generated in this office. Cornerstone keeps records for 7 years past the date of the last contact. Then, because of space and privacy concerns, records are destroyed in compliance with state law and professional ethics.

Dissatisfaction with Services

Remember that a counselor who meets the needs of one person may be wrong for another. If you are dissatisfied with the services of your counselor:

- Express your concern(s) directly to the counselor if possible.
- Seek advice of the counselor's supervisor if the counselor is practicing in a setting where he/she receives direct supervision.
- Terminate the counselor relationship if the situation remains unresolved.
- Contact the Ohio Counselor, Social Work, and Marriage & Family Board (OCSWMFT) or the American Counseling Association (ACA) if you believe the counselor's conduct to be unethical.

OCSWMFT Board

50 West Broad Street, Suite 1075
Columbus, OH 43215-5919
(614) 728-7791
Fax Number: (614) 728-7790

American Counseling Association

5999 Stevenson Ave.
Alexandria, VA 22304
(800) 347-6647
Fax Number: (703) 823-0252