



**Michelle Smith, MA , LPCC, T.E.A.M. (level 1)**

### **Informed Written Consent for Services**

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 Bellevue LLC 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 Michelle Smith, MA LPCC, T.E.A.M. (level 1) will take approximately 55 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 counselors are legally and ethically required to adhere to a code of ethics. The American Counseling Association (ACA) code of ethics is available upon request.

### **Counselor Qualifications**

Michelle Smith, MA, LPCC, T.E.A.M. (level 1), graduated from Spring Arbor University receiving her bachelor's degree in fine arts with a specialty in family life education. She graduated from the master's program in clinical mental health counseling from Liberty University. Michelle is an active member of the American Association of Christian Counselors and Ohio Counselor's Association. She specializes in working with a wide variety of populations including children, adolescents, and adults. Michelle has received necessary training in assisting individuals struggling with anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, abuse and/or trauma, grief, and loss, etc. to creatively solve problems using authorized programs, tools, and multiple theories. Michelle is also trained in EMDR as well as trauma certified. Additionally, Michelle's focus is on T.E.A.M. therapy developed by Dr. David Burns, somatic therapy, and is beginning to work with internal family systems. This style is rooted in cognitive behavioral therapy. Michelle works under the clinical supervision of Daniel J. Higgins, MA, LPCC-S.

### **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 assessments 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 55 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 office, 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, reading, and so forth. 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 the situation is that brought you to therapy. The benefits from counseling may be an improved ability to relate with others; a clearer understanding of self, values, and goals; increased academic productivity; and an ability to deal with everyday stress. Taking personal responsibility for working on 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 such as the specific issues or difficulties you hope to address, the severity of your issues, how good of a fit you and your counselor are, the goals you have set, and the degree of 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 of anger, sadness, worry, fear, and so forth, or experiencing anxiety, depression, insomnia, and so forth. Counseling may challenge some of your assumptions or perceptions or pose different ways of looking at, thinking about, or handling situations that can cause you to feel very 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 a 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 the 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 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 with 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-old) 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 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 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 understands 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.

Suicide and Crisis Hotline  
Counseling Hotline

988  
567-867-HOPE(4673)

### **Fees & Payments**

Counseling is provided at our standard fee of \$120.00 per 55-minute clinical hour. The fee for the diagnostic assessment (initial session) is \$140.00. 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 want us to bill your insurance company. You are ultimately responsible for paying 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 and will end approximately five minutes till the hour. 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 timeliest treatment for you and your children. ***It is mandatory for the 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 for the full amount due Cornerstone for that session.

### **Records**

Legally and ethically, we are required to keep a record of all our interactions. Your counseling records are stored in a secure location and only authorized people have access to those records. Legally, you have the right to see all the 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 needs. You are also entitled to a copy of any record generated in this office. Cornerstone keeps records for 7 years past the date of 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**

77 South High Street, 24<sup>th</sup> Floor Rm 2468  
Columbus, OH 43215-6171  
(614)466-0912  
Fax Number: (614)728-7790

#### **American Counseling Association**

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