



## Serenity Springs Counseling & Wellness

### Telemental Health Services

#### Informed Consent

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There are several reasons you may wish to engage in your counseling services via secure video sessions (ie. “Telemental Health”). These may include, but are not limited to, transportation limitations, illness in the family, work schedule, remote location, convenience, etc.

### Overview

Following are important points of summary information regarding telemental health services that it is important you are aware of:

- You will need access to certain technology in order to engage in telemental health services.
- As with in person sessions, telemental health has both benefits and risks, which you and I will be monitoring as we proceed.
- It is possible that telemental health will turn out to be inappropriate for you or your situation.
- You have the right to stop telemental health at any time.
- You are responsible for creating an appropriate space for your telemental health sessions.
- You will need to participate in creating a plan for managing technology failures, mental health crises, and medical emergencies.
- I follow security best practices and legal standards in order to protect your health care information. You will also need to participate in maintaining your own security and privacy.

### What is Telemental Health?

“Telemental health” is “the use of interactive audio, video or other electronic media for the purposes of diagnosis, consultation or treatment.” It refers to the provision of mental health services with the provider and the recipient of services being in separate locations, and the services being delivered over electronic media.

Services delivered via telemental health rely on electronic, typically Internet-based, technology tools. These tools can include videoconferencing software, email, text messaging, virtual environments, specialized mobile health (“mHealth”) apps, and others.

Video services such as Skype, Facetime, Google Hangouts, audio/video systems are not 100% secure and therefore I do not use them. I use [VSee](#) for video conferencing. It is HIPAA-secure, thus providing a higher likelihood of preserving your privacy (nothing is 100% secure). You will need to download the VSee app onto your device (laptop, desktop, or mobile device) in order to have a telemental health session with me. You will also need access to Internet service in order to participate in a session. You can download the VSee app here:

<https://my.vsee.com/download>

If you have any questions or concerns about VSee, please address them directly to me so we can discuss their risks, benefits, and specific application to your treatment.

## Benefits and Risks of Telemental Health

Receiving services via telemental health allows you to:

- Receive services at times or in places where the service may not otherwise be available.
- Receive services in a fashion that may be more convenient and less prone to delays than in-person meetings.
- Receive services when you are unable to travel to my office.
- The unique characteristics of telemental health may also help some people make improved progress on goals that may not have been otherwise achievable without telemental health.

Receiving services via telemental health has the following risks:

Telemental health services can be impacted by technical failures, may introduce risks to your privacy, and may reduce my ability to directly intervene in crises or emergencies. Here is a non-exhaustive list of examples:

- Internet connections, software applications, and computing devices could cease working or become too unstable to use.
- Cloud-based service personnel, IT assistants, and malicious actors (“hackers”) may have the ability to access your private information that is transmitted or stored in the process of telemental health-based service delivery.
- Computer or smartphone hardware can have sudden failures or run out of power, or local power services can go out.
- Interruptions may disrupt services at important moments, and I may be unable to reach you quickly or using the most effective tools. I may also be unable to help you in-person.

Mental Health Counseling using video services may not be as comprehensive as in-person treatment. If I believe you would be better served by other interventions, I will refer you to a mental health professional who can provide those services. In fact, we both have the right to discuss other options for your care should either of us feel that our work together, or this medium is not effective.

There may be additional benefits and risks to telemental health services that arise from the lack of in-person contact or presence, the distance between you and me at the time of service, and the technological tools used to deliver services. I will assess these potential benefits and risks, sometimes in collaboration with you, as our relationship progresses.

## Assessing Telemental Health’s Fit For You

Although it is well validated by research, service delivery via telemental health is not a good fit for every person. I will continuously assess if working via telemental health is appropriate for your case. If it is not appropriate, and we are unable to arrange in-office visits instead, I will help you find in-person providers with whom to continue services.

Please talk to me if you find the telemental health platform so difficult to use that it distracts from the services being provided, if the platform causes trouble focusing on your services, or if there are any other reasons why the telemental health platform seems to be causing problems in receiving services. **Raising your questions or concerns will not, by itself, result in termination of services.** Bringing your concerns to me is often a part of the process.

You also have a right to stop receiving services by telemental health at any time without prejudice. If you are reasonably able to access my in-person services, you will not be prevented from accessing those services if you choose to stop using telemental health.

## Telemental Health in my practice

- I prefer to conduct the initial mental health evaluation in person. In some cases, I may approve of initiating counseling through a video session. The content of video sessions can include ongoing assessment, consultation, treatment planning, and counseling.
- I am not licensed to practice counseling in any state other than North Carolina. There may be certain limited conditions under which you and I can use video to meet while you are in another state; I will consider these on a case-by-case basis.
- Telemental health sessions may not be covered by your insurance. It is your responsibility to verify that they will pay for these sessions. You are financially responsible for any fees/services they do not reimburse for.

## Your Telemental Health Environment

You will be responsible for creating a safe and confidential space during sessions. You should use a space that will ensure your privacy. It should also be difficult or impossible for people outside the space to see or hear your interactions with me during the session. If you are unsure of how to do this, please ask me for assistance.

## Our Communication Plan

At our first session, we will develop a plan for backup communications in case of technology failures and a plan for responding to emergencies and mental health crises. Following are the standard contact/procedures for me:

- My contact number is 919.414.7712. This should be the primary mode of communication should we experience any technical or other issues that prevent or interrupt our telemental health sessions.
- When contacting me outside of an appointment time, my response may be delayed by up to 48 business hours. I am typically not available to respond to communications between the hours of 9pm and 9am or on weekends.

Our work is done during our appointed sessions. Contact between sessions should be limited to:

- Confirming or changing appointment times
- Billing questions or issues
- Other agreed upon communication that supports our plan for working together.

I may coordinate care with one or more of your other providers. I will use reasonable care to ensure that those communications are secure and that they safeguard your privacy.

## Our Safety and Emergency Plan

As a recipient of telemental health services, you will need to participate in ensuring your safety during mental health crises, medical emergencies, and sessions that you have with me.

I will require you to designate an emergency contact. You will need to provide permission for me to communicate with this person about your care during emergencies.

I will also develop with you a plan for what to do during mental health crises and emergencies, and a plan for how to keep your space safe during sessions. It is important that you engage with me in the creation of these plans and that you follow them when you need to.

## Your Security and Privacy

Except where otherwise noted, I employ software and hardware tools that adhere to security best practices and applicable legal standards for the purposes of protecting your privacy and ensuring that records of your health care services are not lost or damaged.

As with all things in telemental health, however, you also have a role to play in maintaining your security. Please use reasonable security protocols to protect the privacy of your own health care information. For example: when communicating with me, use devices and applications that are protected by unique passwords that only you know.

The laws that protect the confidentiality of your personal information apply just as much to video sessions as they do to in-person counseling. That is, the information released by you during your sessions is generally confidential. There are both mandatory and permissive exceptions to confidentiality: child or vulnerable adult abuse; expressed intent to harm yourself or others; or as a part of legal proceedings where information is requested by a court of law. With those exceptions, I will never convey any personally identifiable images or information from our video interaction to other entities without your written authorization, except as permitted by HIPAA for purposes of coordination of care.

## Recordings

Please do not record video or audio sessions without my consent. Making recordings can quickly and easily compromise your privacy and should be done only with great care. I will not record video or audio sessions.

I understand and agree to the above policies and procedures.

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Signature of Client or Parent/Guardian

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Date

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Printed Name of Signator

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Printed Name of Client if different from above