



# FortitudeFocus, LLC

## COUNSELING SERVICES

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### **INFORMATION, AUTHORIZATION, & CONSENT TO TREATMENT**

I am very pleased that you have selected me to be your therapist, and I am sincerely looking forward to assisting you. This document is designed to inform you about what you can expect from me regarding confidentiality, emergencies, and several other details regarding your treatment. Although providing this document is part of an ethical obligation to my profession, more importantly, it is part of my commitment to you to keep you fully informed of every part of your therapeutic experience. Please know that your relationship with me is a collaborative one, and I welcome any questions, comments, or suggestions regarding your course of therapy at any time.

#### **Background Information**

The following information regarding my educational background and experience as a therapist is an ethical requirement of my profession. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask.

I received my bachelor's degree in Communications from Georgia Southern University and my master's degree from the University of West Georgia. I'm currently a doctoral candidate at Regent University in the Counselor Education and Supervision PhD program. I've been practicing psychotherapy since 2018, first as a high school counselor and then at a group counseling practice. I've presented at several workshops and conferences on topics such as multicultural counseling, school counselor supervision, and student mental health issues. Additionally, I have been a member in good standing in the following professional associations: American Counselor Association (ACA), Licensed Professional Counselors Association of GA (LPCA), and Georgia School Counselor Association (GSCA). I'm licensed in the state of Georgia as a Professional Counselor, license #015435 and as a Certified School Counselor. Finally, I have specialized training in Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Solution-Focused Brief Therapy (SFBT), and Eye Movement Desensitization Reprocessing (EMDR) trauma therapy.

#### **Theoretical Views & Client Participation**

It is my belief that as people become more aware and accepting of themselves, they are more capable of finding a sense of peace and contentment in their lives. However, self-awareness and self-acceptance are goals that may take a long time to achieve. Some clients need only a few sessions to achieve these goals, whereas others may require months or even years of therapy. As a client, you are in complete control, and you may end your relationship with me at any point.

In order for therapy to be most successful, it is important for you to take an active role. This means working on the things you and I talk about both during and between sessions. This also means avoiding any mind-altering substances like alcohol or non-prescription drugs for at least eight hours prior to your therapy sessions. Generally, the more of yourself you are willing to invest, the greater the return.

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Furthermore, it is my policy to only see clients who I believe have the capacity to resolve their own problems with my assistance. It is my intention to empower you in your growth process to the degree that you are capable of facing life's challenges in the future without me. I also don't believe in creating dependency or prolonging therapy if the therapeutic intervention does not seem to be helping. If this is the case, I will direct you to other resources that will be of assistance to you. Your personal development is my number one priority. I encourage you to let me know if you feel that terminating therapy or transferring to another therapist is necessary at any time. My goal is to facilitate healing and growth, and I am very committed to helping you in whatever way seems to produce maximum benefit. I truly hope we can talk about any of these decisions. If at any point you are unable to keep your appointments or I don't hear from you for one month, I will need to close your chart. However, as long as I still have space in my schedule, reopening your chart and resuming treatment is always an option.

### **Confidentiality & Records**

Your communications with me will become part of a clinical record of treatment, and it is referred to as Protected Health Information (PHI). Your PHI will be stored electronically with either Alma or Headway therapy services (depending on your insurance carrier), secure storage companies who have signed a HIPAA Business Associate Agreement (BAA). The BAA ensures that they will maintain the confidentiality of your PHI in a HIPAA-compatible, secure format using point-to-point, Federally approved encryption. Additionally, I will always keep everything you say to me completely confidential, with the following exceptions: (1) you direct me to tell someone else, and you sign a "Release of Information" form; (2) I determine that you are a danger to yourself or to others; (3) you report information about the abuse of a child, an elderly person, or a disabled individual who may require protection; or (4) I am ordered by a judge to disclose information. In the latter case, my license does provide me with the ability to uphold what is legally termed "privileged communication." Privileged communication is your right as a client to have a confidential relationship with a therapist. This state has a very good track record in respecting this legal right. If, for some unusual reason, a judge were to order the disclosure of your private information, this order can be appealed. I cannot guarantee that the appeal will be sustained, but I will do everything in my power to keep what you say confidential. Since your therapist practices in more than one state, we will make sure to provide you with any additional information related to confidentiality in the state where you are at the time of services as necessary.

Please note that in couples counseling, I do not agree to keep secrets. Information revealed in any context may be discussed with either partner.

### **Professional Relationship**

Our relationship must be different from most other relationships. It may differ in how long it lasts, the objectives, or the topics discussed. It must also be limited to only the relationship of therapist and client. If you and I were to interact in any other way, we would then have a "dual relationship," which could prove to be harmful to you in the long run and is, therefore, unethical in the mental health profession. Dual relationships can set up conflicts between the therapist's interests and the client's interests, and then the client's (your) interests might not be put first. To offer all of my clients the best care, my judgment needs to be unselfish and purely focused on your needs. This is why your relationship with me must remain professional in nature.

Additionally, there are important differences between therapy and friendship. Friends may see your position 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 is useful. They may *need* to have you do what they advise. A therapist offers you choices and helps you choose what is best for you. A therapist helps you learn how to solve problems better and make better decisions. A therapist's responses to your situation are based on tested theories and methods of change.

There is another dual relationship that therapists are ethically required to avoid. This is providing therapy while also providing a legal opinion. These are considered mutually exclusive unless you hire a therapist

specifically for a legal opinion, which is considered "forensic" work and not therapy. My passion is not in forensic work but in providing you with the best therapeutic care possible. Therefore, by signing this document, you acknowledge that I will be providing therapy only and not forensic services. You also understand that this means I will not participate in custody evaluations, depositions, court proceedings, or any other forensic activities. However, if for some reason I am compelled to testify to a court of law, I will require an upfront retainer of \$3,000.00, and my billing rate will be \$500.00 per hour, plus you agree to be responsible for the reasonable attorney fees I am charged by my counsel. Additionally, if I receive a valid subpoena to produce or a valid request for the production of documents, I will need to charge you reasonable and customary fees based on state and Federal guidelines of \$1.00 per page or the maximum allowed by law to produce those records. If a summary of treatment is accepted instead of the entire set of records, I charge my prorated hourly rate for the time to produce this summary. I will also need to charge you the reasonable attorney fees associated with that production, which will take place by and through my counsel's office to preserve your confidentiality.

Additionally, since therapists are required to keep the identity of their clients confidential, for your confidentiality, I will not address you in public unless you speak to me first. I must also decline any invitation to attend gatherings with your family or friends. Lastly, when your therapy is completed, I will not be able to be a friend to you like your other friends. In sum, it is my ethical duty as a therapist to always maintain a professional role. Please note that these guidelines are not meant to be discourteous in any way; they are strictly for your long-term protection.

### **Statement Regarding Ethics, Client Welfare & Safety**

I assure you that my services will be rendered in a professional manner consistent with the ethical standards of the American Counseling Association. If at any time you feel that I am not performing in an ethical or professional manner, I ask that you please let me know immediately. If we are unable to resolve your concern, I will provide you with information to contact the professional licensing board that governs my profession.

Due to the very nature of psychotherapy, as much as I would like to guarantee specific results regarding your therapeutic goals, I am unable to do so. However, with your participation, we will work to achieve the best possible results for you. Please also be aware that changes made in therapy may affect other people in your life. For example, an increase in your assertiveness may not always be welcomed by others. It is my intention to help you manage changes in your interpersonal relationships as they arise, but it is important for you to be aware of this possibility, nonetheless.

Additionally, at times, people find that they feel somewhat worse when they first start therapy before they begin to feel better. This may occur as you begin discussing certain sensitive areas of your life. However, a topic usually isn't sensitive unless it needs attention. Therefore, discovering the discomfort is actually a success. Once you and I are able to target your specific treatment needs and the particular modalities that work the best for you, help is generally on the way.

For the safety of all my clients, their accompanying family members, children, other therapists in the building, and staff (if applicable), I maintain a zero-tolerance weapons policy. No weapon of any kind is permitted on the premises, including guns, explosives, ammunition, knives, swords, razor blades, pepper spray, garrotes, or anything that could be harmful to yourself or others. I reserve the right to contact law enforcement officials and/or terminate treatment with any client who violates my weapons policy.

### **Telemental Health Statement**

Telemental Health is defined as follows:

“Telemental Health means the mode of delivering services via technology-assisted media, such as but not limited to, a telephone, video, internet, a smartphone, tablet, PC desktop system or other electronic means using appropriate encryption technology for electronic health information. Telemental Health facilitates client self-management and support for clients and includes synchronous interactions and asynchronous store and forward transfers.” (Georgia Code 135-11-.01)

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Telemental Health is a relatively new concept despite the fact that many therapists have been using technology-assisted media for years. Breaches of confidentiality over the past decade have made it evident that Personal Health Information (PHI) as it relates to technology needs an extra level of protection. Additionally, there are several other factors that need to be considered regarding the delivery of Telemental Health services in order to provide you with the highest level of care. Therefore, I have completed specialized training in Telemental Health required by the state of Georgia. I have also developed several policies and protective measures to ensure your PHI remains confidential. These are discussed below.

### The Different Forms of Technology-Assisted Media Explained

#### **Telephone via Landline:**

It is important for you to know that even landline telephones may not be completely secure and confidential. There is a possibility that someone could overhear or even intercept your conversations with special technology. Individuals who have access to your telephone or your telephone bill may be able to determine who you have talked to, who initiated that call, and how long the conversation lasted. If you have a landline and you provided me with that phone number, I may contact you on this line from my own landline in my office or from my cell phone, typically only regarding setting up an appointment if needed. If this is not an acceptable way to contact you, please let me know. Telephone conversations (other than just setting up appointments) are billed at my hourly rate.

#### **Cell phones:**

In addition to landlines, cell phones may not be completely secure or confidential. There is also a possibility that someone could overhear or intercept your conversations. Be aware that individuals who have access to your cell phone or your cell phone bill may be able to see who you have talked to, who initiated that call, how long the conversation was, and where each party was located when that call occurred. However, I realize that most people have and utilize a cell phone. I may also use a cell phone to contact you, typically only regarding setting up an appointment if needed. Telephone conversations (other than just setting up appointments) are billed at my hourly rate. Additionally, I keep your phone number in my cell phone, but it is listed by your initials only and my phone is password protected. If this is a problem, please let me know, and we will discuss our options.

#### **Text Messaging:**

Text messaging is not a secure means of communication and may compromise your confidentiality. However, I realize that many people prefer to text because it is a quick way to convey information. **Nonetheless, please know that it is my policy to utilize this means of communication strictly for appointment confirmations.** Please do not bring up any therapeutic content via text to prevent compromising your confidentiality. You also need to know that I am required to keep a copy or summary of all texts as part of your clinical record that address anything related to therapy.

#### **Email:**

Email is not a secure means of communication and may compromise your confidentiality. However, I realize that many people prefer email because it is a quick way to convey information. **Nonetheless, please know that it is my policy to utilize this means of communication strictly for appointment confirmations.** Please do not bring up any therapeutic content via email to prevent compromising your confidentiality. You also need to know that I am required to keep a copy or summary of all emails as part of your clinical record that addresses anything related to therapy.

I also strongly suggest that you only communicate through a device that you know is safe and technologically secure (e.g., has a firewall, anti-virus software installed, is password protected, does not access the internet through a public wireless network, etc.). If you are in a crisis, please do not communicate this to me via email because I may not see it in a timely matter. Instead, please see below under "Emergency Procedures."

Please initial that you have read this page \_\_\_\_\_

**Social Media - Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, Etc:**

It is my policy not to accept "friend" or "connection" requests from any current or former client on my **personal** social networking sites, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, etc., because it may compromise your confidentiality and blur the boundaries of our relationship. Please refrain from contacting me using social media messaging systems such as Facebook Messenger or Twitter. These methods have insufficient security, and I do not watch them closely. I would not want to miss an important message from you.

**Video Conferencing (VC):**

Video Conferencing is an option for us to conduct remote sessions over the internet where we not only can speak to one another but may also see each other on a screen. I utilize Zoom. This VC platform is encrypted to the federal standard, HIPAA compatible, and has signed a HIPAA Business Associate Agreement (BAA). The BAA means that Zoom is willing to attest to HIPAA compliance and assumes responsibility for keeping our VC interaction secure and confidential. If we choose to utilize this technology, I will give you detailed directions regarding how to log in securely. I also ask that you please sign on to the platform at least five minutes prior to your session time to ensure we get started promptly. Additionally, you are responsible for initiating the connection with me at the time of your appointment.

I strongly suggest that you only communicate through a computer or device that you know is safe (e.g., has a firewall and anti-virus software installed, is password protected, does not access the Internet through a public wireless network or has the ability for you to turn on a virtual private network, etc.).

**Recommendations to Websites or Applications (Apps):**

During the course of our treatment, I may recommend that you visit certain websites for pertinent information or self-help. I may also recommend certain apps that could be of assistance to you and enhance your treatment. Please be aware that websites and apps may have tracking devices that allow automated software or other entities to know that you've visited these sites or applications. They may even utilize your information to attempt to sell you other products. Additionally, anyone who has access to the device you used to visit these sites/apps may be able to see that you have been to these sites by viewing the history on your device. Therefore, it is your responsibility to decide if you would like this information as an adjunct to your treatment or if you prefer that I do not make these recommendations. Please let me know by checking (or not checking) the appropriate box at the end of this document.

**Electronic Transfer of PHI for Billing Purposes:**

If I am credentialed with and a provider for your insurance, please know that I utilize billing services that have access to your PHI. Your PHI will be securely transferred electronically to either Alma or Headway therapy services. This billing company has signed a HIPAA Business Associate Agreement (BAA). The BAA ensures that they will maintain the confidentiality of your PHI in a HIPAA compatible secure format using point-to-point, federally approved encryption. Additionally, if your insurance provider is billed, you will generally receive correspondence from your insurance company, my billing company, or both.

**Electronic Transfer of PHI for Certain Credit Card Transactions:**

I utilize Square as the company that processes your credit card information. This company may send the credit card holder a text or an email receipt indicating that you used that credit card for my services, the date you used it, and the amount that was charged. This notification is usually set up two different ways - either upon your request at the time the card is run or automatically. Please know that it is your responsibility to know if you or the credit card holder has the automatic receipt notification set up in order to maintain your confidentiality if you do not want a receipt sent via text or email. Additionally, please be aware that the transaction will also appear on your credit-card bill. The name on the charge will appear as Fortitude Focus, LLC.

Please initial that you have read this page \_\_\_\_\_

### Artificial Intelligence:

Combining the benefits of psychological expertise with AI-enabled technology is proving to have a positive impact on client treatment in healthcare. I want to use every tool at my disposal to be of service to my clients, so I may utilize this technology to assist us in diagnosing, creating state-of-the-art treatment plans, or recommending between-session support. Please know, however, that I will follow the rules of HIPAA de-identification and never use your PHI when entering prompts or anything else that could compromise your confidentiality. I also only choose platforms that do the same to protect your privacy and confidentiality.

On the other hand, I will not utilize AI assistance to communicate with you (e.g., have a GPT write emails for me), and I prefer that you also do not enlist a GPT service or other AI system to communicate with me to protect your confidentiality and for us to have a genuine relationship.

### Your Responsibilities for Confidentiality & Telemental Health

Please communicate only through devices that you know are secure, as described above. It is also your responsibility to choose a secure location to interact with technology-assisted media and to be aware that family, friends, employers, co-workers, strangers, and hackers could either overhear your communications or have access to the technology that you are interacting with. Additionally, you agree not to record any Telemental Health sessions.

### In Case of Technology Failure

During a Telemental Health session, we might encounter a technological failure. The most reliable backup plan is to contact one another via telephone. Please make sure you have a phone with you, and I have that phone number.

If we get disconnected from a video conferencing or chat session, end and restart the session. If we are unable to reconnect within ten minutes, please call me.

If we are on a phone session and we get disconnected, please call me back or contact me to schedule another session. If the issue is due to *my* phone service and we are not able to reconnect, I will not charge you for that session.

### Limitations of Telemental Health Therapy Services

Telemental health services may have some limitations. Primarily, there is a risk of misunderstanding one another when communication lacks visual or auditory cues. For example, if video quality is lacking for some reason, I might not see a tear in your eye. Or, if audio quality is lacking, I might not hear the crack in your voice that I could easily pick up if you were in my office.

There may also be a disruption to the service (e.g., the phone gets cut off or the video drops). This can be frustrating and interrupt the normal flow of personal interaction.

Please know that I have the utmost respect and positive regard for you and your well-being. I would never do or say anything intentionally to hurt you in any way, and I strongly encourage you to let me know if something I've done or said has upset you. I invite you to keep our communication open at all times to reduce any possible harm.

### Identification & Passwords for New Clients

During our first session, I will require you to show a valid picture ID and another form of identity verification, such as a credit card in your name. **At this time, you will also choose a password, phrase, or number that you will use to identify yourself in all future sessions. This procedure prevents another person from posing as you.**

Please initial that you have read this page \_\_\_\_\_

### Consent to Telemental Health Services

Please check the Telemental Health services you are **NOT** authorizing me to utilize for your treatment or administrative purposes. Together, we will ultimately determine which modes of communication are best for you. However, you may change your mind and authorize the use of any of these services at any time during the course of your treatment just by notifying me in writing. If you do not see an item discussed previously in this document listed for you to opt out of, this is because it is a standard feature built-in to the majority of therapy practices, and I will be utilizing that technology unless otherwise negotiated by you (e.g., an encrypted electronic health records platform that includes a portal for communication and scheduling). Again, please **Opt-Out** of any of the following technology you would NOT like for me to utilize in your treatment.

- Texting
- Email
- Video Conferencing
- Website Portal
- Recommendations for Websites or Apps
- Artificial Intelligence to enhance treatment conceptualization and treatment

In summary, technology is constantly changing, and there are implications to all of the above that we may not realize at this time. Feel free to ask questions, and please know that I am open to any feelings or thoughts you have about these and other modalities of communication and treatment.

### Communication Response Time

My practice is considered to be an outpatient facility, and I am set up to accommodate individuals who are reasonably safe and resourceful. I do not carry an emergency phone, nor am I available at all times. If at any time this does not feel like sufficient support, please inform me, and we can discuss additional resources or transfer your case to a therapist or clinic with 24-hour availability. I will return phone calls within 24 to 36 hours. However, I do not return calls or any form of communication on most weekends, holidays, and times of vacation. If you are having a mental health emergency and need immediate assistance, please follow the instructions below.

### In Case of an Emergency

If you have a mental health emergency, I encourage you **NOT** to wait for communication back from me, but do one or more of the following:

- Call Behavioral Health Link/GCAL: 800-715-4225
- Call Emory University Hospital at Wesley Woods: 404-728-6222 or any other local mental health hospital
- Ridgeview Institute at 770-434-4567
- Call Peachford Hospital at 770-454-5589
- Call or text 988 Suicide Prevention & Crisis Line
- Crisis Text Line: Text “Home” to 741741
- Call 911
- Go to the emergency room of your choice

If we decide to include Telemental Health as part of your treatment, there are additional procedures that we need to have in place specific to Telemental Health services. These are for your safety in case of an emergency and are as follows:

Please initial that you have read this page \_\_\_\_\_

- You understand that if you are having suicidal or homicidal thoughts, experiencing psychotic symptoms, or in a crisis that we cannot solve remotely, I may determine that you need a higher level of care and Telemental Health services are not appropriate.
- I require an Emergency Contact Person (ECP) who I may contact on your behalf in a life-threatening emergency only. Please write this person's name and contact information below. Either you or I will verify that your ECP is willing and able to go to your location in the event of an emergency. Additionally, if either you, your ECP, or we determine it is necessary, the ECP agrees to take you to a hospital. Your signature at the end of this document indicates that you understand we will only contact this individual in the extreme circumstances stated above. Please list your ECP here:  
Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_
- You agree to inform me of the address where you are at the beginning of every Telemental Health session.
- You agree to inform me of the nearest mental health hospital to your primary location that you prefer to go to in the event of a mental health emergency (usually located where you will typically be during a Telemental Health session). Please list this hospital and contact number here:  
Hospital: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### **Structure and Cost of Sessions**

Based on your treatment needs, I may provide face-to-face, phone, text, email, or video conferencing. The structure and cost of both in-person sessions and Telemental Health are \$150 per 50-minute session unless otherwise negotiated by your insurance carrier. The fee for each session will be due at the conclusion of the session. Cash, personal checks, Visa, MasterCard, Discover, or American Express are acceptable for payment, and I will provide you with a detailed receipt of payment. The receipt of payment may also be used as a statement for insurance if applicable to you. Please note that there is a \$35 fee for any returned checks.

Phone calls, texting, and emails (other than just setting up appointments) are billed at my hourly rate for the time I spend reading and responding. Your credit card will be charged at the conclusion of each billable interaction. **Again, this includes any therapeutic interaction other than setting up appointments.**

### **Insurance**

Insurance companies have many rules and requirements specific to certain plans. For example, most insurance companies will not cover therapy over text or email, and most require a deductible to be met both in-network and out-of-network. If we have discussed that I do not accept your insurance, it is your responsibility to find out your insurance company's policies and file for insurance reimbursement. If this is the case, I will be glad to provide you with a statement for your insurance company and assist you with any questions you may have in this area. If we have discussed that I am in-network with your provider, please complete the "Insurance Agreement" that has also been made available to you.

### **Cancellation Policy**

If you are unable to keep an appointment, you must notify me at least 24 hours in advance. If such advance notice is not received, you will be financially responsible for the session you missed. Please note that insurance companies do not reimburse for missed sessions. Additionally, your signature below indicates that you understand if you dispute a cancellation charge on your credit card, I will need to provide this document to your credit card company as proof that you agreed to this policy. This would mean that your credit card company would see that you agreed to be treated in my practice. I would not disclose any PHI other than this Informed Consent agreeing to my policies.

### **Our Agreement to Enter into a Therapeutic Relationship**

Please initial that you have read this page \_\_\_\_\_

Please print, date, and sign your name below indicating that you have read and understand the contents of this “Information, Authorization, and Consent to Treatment” form, **as well as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) Notice of Privacy Practices**” provided to you separately. Your signature also indicates that you agree to the policies of your relationship with me and that you authorize me to begin treatment with you. Please note that this updated "Information, Authorization & Consent to Treatment" replaces any previously signed informed consents.

I am sincerely looking forward to facilitating you on your journey toward healing and growth. If you have any questions about any part of this document, please ask.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Client Name (Please Print)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Client Signature**

**If Applicable:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Parent’s or Legal Guardian’s Name (Please Print)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Parent’s or Legal Guardian’s Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Parent’s or Legal Guardian’s Name (Please Print)**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Parent’s or Legal Guardian’s Signature**

The therapist's signature below indicates that they have discussed this form with you and answered any questions you have regarding this information.

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Therapist’s Signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

**Please initial that you have read this page** \_\_\_\_\_