

# Tri-Lakes Relational Center Springfield

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## Counseling Services Agreement

Ensuring Fully Informed Consent for Counseling and Introducing How We Do Therapy

**Welcome to *Tri-Lakes Relational Center- Springfield*.** We appreciate your giving us the opportunity to be of help to you.

This document answers questions that clients often ask about counseling. We believe our work will be most helpful to you when you have a clear idea of what we are trying to do. This document also contains important information about our professional services and business policies. Please read it carefully and jot down any questions you might have so that we can discuss them at our next meeting. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between us.

A primary commitment of *Tri-Lakes Relational Center- Springfield* is to provide you with *Biblically Christian and Clinically Proven* counseling services. In keeping with this policy, we have listed below various counseling standards. Our standards are established by state and professional guidelines, as well as Biblical teaching regarding the care of others.

*Tri-Lakes Relational Center- Springfield*, hereafter **TRC-S**, is committed to your right of information regarding:

- **Standards of Competent Service**
  - Services the counselor will provide
  - Goals of the therapeutic relationship
  - Risks and benefits of therapeutic procedures
- **Policies and Procedures**
  - Behavior expected of the client
  - Physical evaluation
  - Financial considerations
  - Payment arrangements
  - Insurance reimbursement
  - Non-discrimination
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  - Contact information
- **Qualifications, Credentials, and Associations**
- **Confidentiality**
  - Electronic Communication
  - Taping or recording of sessions
  - Minors
- **Consent**

### Standards of Competent Service

*Services the counselor will provide.* Counseling is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the counselor and client, and the particular problems you bring forward. There are many different methods we may use to deal with the problems that you hope to address. Counseling is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, it calls for a very active effort on your part. In order for the therapy to be most successful, you will have to work on things we talk about both during our sessions and at home. Our first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, your counselor will be able to offer you some first impressions of what our work will include and a treatment plan to follow, if you decide to continue with therapy. You should evaluate this information along with your own opinions of whether you feel comfortable working with your counselor. Therapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should be very careful about the therapist you select. If you have questions about TRC-S procedures, you should discuss them whenever they arise. If your doubts persist, your counselor will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion. All counselors of TRC-S have been trained to know a variety of methods and techniques. Your counselor will determine from his or her assessment of your situation and through consultation, if deemed beneficial, which is the most effective for you.

*Goals of the therapeutic relationship.* Your counselor will work with you both to determine the goals you would like to set for counseling and to help you achieve those goals. While length of treatment is difficult to determine, your counselor will be happy to discuss this and the style of treatment with you.

*Risks and benefits of therapeutic procedures.* Counseling can have both benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. On the other hand, counseling has also been shown to have benefits for people who go through it. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. But there are no guarantees of what you will experience. You may, at any time, seek a second opinion and/or terminate treatment.

## **Policies and Procedures**

*Behavior expected of the client.* Your counselor will normally conduct an evaluation during the first few sessions. During this time, both you and your counselor can decide if he or she is the best person to provide the services you need in order to meet your treatment goals. If therapy is begun, your counselor will usually schedule one 45-minute session (one appointment hour of 45 minutes duration) per week at a time you agree on, although some sessions may be longer or more frequent. **Once an appointment hour is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide 24 hours advance notice of cancellation.** Sessions will begin at the time scheduled. If the counselor causes a late start, the session will still last for 45 minutes. **If you arrive late for your appointment, the session will have to end at the regularly scheduled time, and the charge will be for the full amount of the appointment fee.** Missed appointments or frequent rescheduling may result in termination of counseling. In this case, the counselor will make a referral to another mental health professional. Children under 12 years of age are not to be left unattended in the waiting room while parents or guardians are at their appointment.

*Physical Evaluation.* If possible, it is strongly recommended that you be current on your physical examinations from your personal physician. This is important to make sure none of the problems discussed are the result of physical health difficulties. Your counselor is not a physician and so he or she will not use physical interventions such as medications. When medications are appropriate your counselor will work closely with your physician.

*Financial considerations.* The hourly fee is \$95, unless other arrangements have been agreed upon by your therapist. In addition to weekly appointments, TRC-S charges this amount for other professional services you may need, though we will break down the hourly cost if we work for periods of less than one hour. Other services include report writing, telephone conversations lasting longer than 5 minutes, attendance at meetings with other professionals you have authorized, preparation of records or treatment summaries, and the time spent performing any other service you may request of you TRC-S. At times it may be necessary to speak to your counselor by telephone, for which there is no charge. However, when phone counseling occurs, the charge is \$15.00 per ten-minute period. If you become involved in legal proceedings that require TRC-S participation, you will be expected to pay for professional clinical time even if your counselor is called to testify by another party.

*Payment arrangements.* You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held; clients are not allowed to carry a balance of any kind. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to when they are requested. There will be a \$35 check charge for each check returned due to insufficient funds. If your account has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements for payment have not been agreed upon, TRC-S has the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may involve hiring a collection agency or going through small claims court. If such legal action is necessary, its costs will be included in the claim. In most collection situations, the only information we release regarding a patient's treatment is his/her name, the nature of services provided, and the amount due. If you have a question about these costs please feel free to speak to your counselor.

*Insurance reimbursement.* In order for us to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate what resources you have available to pay for your treatment. If you have a health insurance policy, it may provide some coverage for mental health treatment. TRC-S will provide you with whatever assistance we can in helping you receive the benefits to which you are entitled; however, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of TRC-S fees. A receipt will be provided for you to submit to your insurance if you so desire. However, TRC-S will not contact or submit any information to insurance for you and has no control over the amount of reimbursement you may or may not receive. You should carefully read the section in your insurance coverage booklet that describes mental health services. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. You should also be aware that most insurance companies require you to authorize us to provide them with a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes TRC-S must provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of the entire record (in rare cases). This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored in a computer. Though all insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, TRC-S has no control over what they do with it once it is in their hands. In some cases, they may share the information with a national medical information databank. TRC-S will provide you with a copy of any report we submit, if you request it.

*Non-discrimination.* TRC-S is committed to all who come to us, regardless of age, sex, race, or religious affiliation. We understand there are areas of counseling which are out of our expertise. In such cases, we seek to assist clients in locating the appropriate resources. TRC-S is a Christian organization and the services we offer are centered on Christian values. Even though we do not seek to impose personal values on the client, we do consider the spiritual along with the physical, social, and psychological aspects of the person. We seek to help individuals integrate their faith with their personality and their relationships.

*Sexual Conduct.* Please be informed that sexual contact between client and therapist of any kind is not a part of any recognized therapy. Sexual intimacy, including intercourse, fondling or seductive language, is not allowed and should be reported to the State Grievance Board by letter or by phone.

*Contact information.* Your counselor may not be immediately available by telephone. While he or she may be in their office, they probably will not answer the phone when with a client. *For non-emergency services please call our office at 417-496-1867.* When we are unavailable, our telephone is answered by an answering service voice mail that we monitor frequently. We will make every effort to return your call on the same day you make it. If you are difficult to reach, please inform us of some times when you will be available. If you are unable to reach us and feel that you can't wait for us to return your call, contact your family physician or the nearest emergency room and ask for the psychologist or psychiatrist on call. *You may also contact the Emergency Hotline 24 hours a day by calling: 417-862-6555 (in Springfield) or 1-800-494-7355.* *If you are experiencing a life-threatening emergency, please call 911 or go to the nearest hospital emergency room.* If your counselor will be unavailable for an extended time, he or she will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact, if necessary.

### **Qualifications, Credentials, and Associations**

Qualifications, credentials, and associations will vary upon who your counselor is. Please reference the paragraph indicated for the counselor you will be seeing.

*Rev. Joshua Spurlock, MA, LPC.* Josh received a Bachelor of Arts in Biblical Languages from Central Bible College in Springfield, Missouri. He received a Master of Arts in Counseling from the Assemblies of God Theological Seminary in Springfield, Missouri. He has completed the academic requirements for Certification as a Christian Sex Therapist at the Institute for Sexual Wholeness, in association with Richmond Graduate University in Atlanta, Georgia. He is a Professional Associate with the American Board of Christian Sex Therapists (ABCST). Josh is registered with the state of Missouri as a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) and is a licensed minister with the General Council of the Assemblies of God. G

If you have any questions about your counselor's experience, training or education feel free to ask them as they arise.

### **Confidentiality**

The law protects the confidentiality of client information retained at TRC-S. Unless you grant us written permission we will neither inform anyone that you are receiving counseling, nor will we disclose the content of counseling sessions. However, there is a limit to confidentiality. The state does mandate that confidentiality would be broken if one or more of the following applies:

- In most legal proceedings, you have the right to prevent TRC-S from providing any information about your treatment. In some proceedings involving child custody and those in which your emotional condition is an important issue, a judge may order your counselor's testimony if he/she determines that the issues demand it.
- There are some situations in which TRC-S is legally obligated to take action to protect others from harm, even if we have to reveal some information about a patient's treatment. For example, if we believe that a child or elderly person or disabled person is being neglected or abused, we are required file a report with the appropriate state agency.
- If we believe that a patient is threatening serious bodily harm to another, we are required to take protective actions. These actions may include notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, or seeking hospitalization for the patient. If the patient threatens to harm himself/herself, we may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.
- These situations rarely occur in outpatient practice, but if a similar situation occurs, your counselor will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action.
- Your counselor may occasionally find it helpful to consult other professionals about a case. During a consultation, every effort is made to avoid revealing the identity of our clients. The consultant is also legally bound to keep the information

confidential. If you don't object, we will not tell you about these consultations unless your counselor feels that it is important to your work together.

- If your therapist is not yet licensed, he or she may share all aspects of your session with his or her supervisor.

*Electronic communication.* While TRC-S is committed to maintaining the privacy and confidentiality of all communications between you and your therapist, it is important to know that the confidentiality of communication through electronic means such as: *telephone, cell phone, e-mail, chat, or other electronic means* can not be guaranteed. You should also be aware, when considering electronic communication, that important *non-verbal* aspects of communication can be hindered when interacting through means other than face-to-face.

*Taping or recording of sessions.* Sometimes your counselor may wish to tape or record counseling sessions for training or consultation purposes. This may include audio, video, and/ or live supervision for training purposes. You will be asked to sign a release of liability for training purposes before any taping or live supervision is done.

*Minors.* If you are under seventeen years of age, please be aware that the law may provide your parents the right to examine your treatment records. It is TRC-S' policy to request an agreement from parents that they agree to give up access to your records. If they agree, your counselor will provide them only with general information about your work together, unless he or she feels there is a high risk that you will seriously harm yourself or someone else. In this case, your counselor will notify them of his or her concern. Your counselor will also provide them with a summary of your treatment when it is complete. Before giving them any information, your counselor will discuss the matter with you, if possible, and do his or her best to handle any objections you may have with what your counselor is prepared to discuss.

While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important that we discuss any questions or concerns that you may have at our next meeting. Your counselor will be happy to discuss these issues with you if you need specific advice, but formal legal advice may be needed because the laws governing confidentiality are quite complex, and we are not attorneys.

*A more expanded document about use and disclosure of TRC-S' privacy practices is included as an addition to this form. Please note you will be asked to sign that you received a copy.*

## **Consent**

When you have read this document, have discussed it with your therapist and received a copy of both this document and the *Notice of Privacy Practices*, please sign the *Informed Consent Signature Form*. Your signature indicates you have read and been given a copy of *Tri-Lakes Relational Center- Springfield Counseling Services Agreement* and understand the conditions as read and agree to receive counseling under these conditions.