



Informed Consent

Approach to Counseling

Counseling can be a challenging, exciting, scary and surprising process.. My overall goal is to collaborate with you for your benefit, growth and wellbeing. Each person is unique, so our work will unfold in its own particular way, but the ground rules are the same for everybody I work with. Please read through this overview, and feel free to ask questions at any time.

My work combines Western psychology, Buddhist/Contemplative psychology and mindfulness practices. You may find that a friendly curiosity about your habits of thought and patterns of behavior helps you to resolve your problems more easily. In my experience, cultivating self-awareness and compassion is the most radical and helpful approach to healing ourselves that we can take. I believe in the power of the intrinsically healthy nature of each person. As we work together, we will develop a range of practical tools that work for you. Counseling is a collaborative effort, and you, are the ultimate authority on your life and in charge of any changes you want to make. I offer my training, my support and assistance to the best of my abilities to help you.

The Process of Counseling

The process of counseling is in some ways - and despite decades of clinical study - still a mystery. Its success depends as much on the individual, your goals and how you work as on the clinical skills of the counselor. What is known - and generally agreed on - is that the relationship between client and therapist is the most important element in successful therapy. If, after 6-8 sessions, you do not feel we are a good fit, I will be happy to help you find someone with whom you can work more effectively. On the other hand, it might make sense to discuss this in depth and see if an old pattern is arising that we might actually be able to resolve through our work together. The choice is yours.

It is usual to see a counselor anywhere from a few months to several years. How long we work together is determined by many factors. It is a good idea to evaluate our work together from time to time, to see that your goals are being met, and how your needs may have changed. Ideally, we will agree on when to complete our work together, but as the client, you may choose to end at any time. It is quite useful to have at least one session focused on completion. You are welcome to return to work with me on an as-needed basis.

Appointments & Cancellations

Sessions last one hour. This includes the time it takes to pay for the session and schedule the next one. If you are late, we will still end at our scheduled time. If I am running late starting your session, I will adjust our ending time so you get your full session.

Meeting on a regular weekly basis, particularly in the early stages of our work together, helps maintain flow and continuity and lends stability to the process of therapy. Meeting less often, or sporadically, can slow the process and create a sense of frustration or lack of progress. Like learning to play a musical instrument, diligent attendance reaps the quickest rewards. However, you are in charge of deciding how often to meet. Your needs may vary over time. Counseling can be intensive and frequent, occasional and supportive, a place to return to for further work down the road, long term, short term, or anything in between. We can discuss how to best evaluate your scheduling needs at any time.

If you miss an appointment, or cancel with less than 24 hours' notice, you will be charged the full fee (currently \$90). I will attempt to contact you to see how you plan to pay for the missed session, but if I can't reach you within 24 hours of the scheduled appointment, your credit card will be charged. Exceptions *may* be made for emergencies such as a sudden illness or accident, at my discretion. If you need to cancel, please call the office (349-0595) at any time, day or night and leave a voicemail.

Phone Calls

Feel free to leave a message on my office voicemail (349-0595) any time, day or night. You can also try my cell phone (521-1157) in an emergency. I rarely answer either one, but I do check my messages regularly. I may not be able to get back to you immediately, though I try to return calls within 24 hours. If you have a simple question or concern, or need to discuss appointment times there is no charge.

Occasionally we may have a phone consultation. This is a mutually agreed upon appointment by phone, in an emergency or when unusual circumstances preclude our meeting face to face. The fee for a phone consultation is \$22 per 15-minute block. It costs a minimum of \$22 whether you speak for 1 minute or 15 of each block. I will not charge you for a phone call without your consent.

Confidentiality

The work we do together is private (see exceptions to this in the Permission to Treat and Professional Disclosure forms). You can, of course, share with whomever you like, but I will not discuss our work with anyone without written permission from you.

If you refer someone to me, I will not confirm or deny to you any contact. If they have become my client, it would be a breach of confidentiality for me to say so.

If we happen to meet outside my office - at a social event or grocery store, for instance - the decision to approach or acknowledge me is up to you. I will not make the first move, in order to protect your privacy. You are welcome to greet me, keeping in mind that confidentiality becomes more complicated if either of us is accompanied.

To some this sounds a bit extreme; for others this barely covers their need for safety. I feel that privacy is a powerful factor in therapy, so I do my best to provide and maintain it.

Thank you for taking the time to read this. Please contact me with any questions or comments.

Ker Cleary, MA 541.349.0595