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Off the Beaten Path Psychology and Wellness Policies and Procedures



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Mission Statement

Off the Beaten Path Psychology and Wellness (OBP) was created to provide psychotherapy and psychological services for those in the Calgary or Airdrie area who are interested in combining movement with therapy. It is intended to take therapy off the couch and out of the office. By walking or running together, we will use its benefits as a catalyst for the work we do. Therapy is a process of self-development and growth. Therefore, this mindful, strength-based approach to mental health treatment is not a running or exercise program. It is not about getting thin or in shape. By connecting with the outdoors and paying attention to the mind-body connection, we will move forward, together.

Glossary

Psychologist- the psychologist that is supporting the client

Client- the person seeking psychological services

Third-party health insurance- the insurance company that pays the psychologist for services rendered to the client

Policies and Procedures

Therapeutic Relationship and Confidentiality

Psychologists are bound by the Standards of Practice of the College of Alberta Psychologists and the Canadian Psychological Association's *Code of Ethics for Psychologists*. It is important that relationships maintain healthy boundaries to show respect to each other. For example, we cannot accept gifts from you or discounts from your business. We cannot have more than one role with each other (i.e. become friends). This means that if we find ourselves in a "dual relationship" (e.g. joining the same running group by coincidence), we will need to discuss this so that we both know what to expect.

Our client's privacy is important to us. What we discuss is confidential. We need written permission to talk to others about the work we do together. However, there are circumstances when we need to ask for extra help from others in order to support clients. If we consider communication with someone else (e.g., a physician, school personnel), we will ask for written permission. That being said, if clients become ill or injured during a session, we might need to call the emergency contact for help. *There are also legal exceptions to the confidentiality agreement. We maintain the responsibility and right to communicate with other 'helpers' when there is: 1) suspected or actual current or ongoing abuse or neglect of a child, dependent adult or elder; 2) danger of future harm to yourself or others (we also reserve the right to call 911 if we hear of or observe potential danger or harm to self or others); or 3) grave disability. In case of a subpoena from a court of law, we may be required to answer questions and submit files. Clients should let us know if this might be a possibility, and we will do our best to prevent the release of a file. We also reserve the right to report any abuse of*

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animals to authorities. As well, if information is shared about past or present illegal activities or about professionals (e.g., counsellors, nurses, teachers) whom clients believe have acted unethically, we reserve the right to take action based on the information supplied. This may include telling relevant bodies such as the Canadian Medical Association or the police. We will always strive to tell clients what action we may need to take on these issues. Also, in order to ensure our work together remains private, we do not allow clients to record sessions in any way. Clients always have the right to ask us to write things down for clients in session, or make notes. Clients can ask questions about any of this at any time!

In order for us to offer clients the best possible service, we will seek consultation from other therapists, particularly within our OBP practice. During these circumstances, we will honour client privacy by not using your name. Because all therapists adhere to codes of ethics concerning confidentiality, we are all legally bound to keep the information confidential. Clients should please let us know if there are any concerns about this. If the client would like, we can provide information about the therapists with whom we consult.

With regard to sessions where clients bring another person, such as a spouse, things can become complicated (for couples work, see the “Top 10 Things to Know About Couples Therapy”)! Part of the work might mean that we share information about clients with the other person during the session. With the exception of information that the client and the therapist have previously agreed to not discuss in the session with the other person, we reserve the right to use our professional discretion regarding what to share and when. Lastly, we work within an office setting where the common area may have other people that are there to see other practitioners in the office.

Client Records and Communications

Client records (including assessment/evaluation and details about session content) will be protected in a locked-fire proof filing cabinet for paper files and on a password-protected, encrypted computer for electronic records within Jane, Google Drive, and Square software applications, all within the OBP team. In addition to sharing Jane and Square systems, OBP psychologists also sometimes share a filing cabinet at the office together. So although we can all see client information, we are all held to the same confidentiality standards. We only look at what we need to provide psychological services to our clients. We will also keep client contact information on our smart phones, which are password protected. If our phones or computers are lost or stolen, we will inform clients immediately. We need to retain client personal health information for some time in order to ensure that we can answer questions that clients might have about services provided as well as for our own accountability. The College of Alberta Psychologists requires that client records be kept for at least 12 years past the date of last contact for adults, and 12 years past the date at which the client would turn 18 years old. Paper records are destroyed by a shredding company we hire. Digital records are permanently and securely deleted from the devices and software applications on which

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they were stored. Emails are archived. Clients have the right to ask for a copy of your file at any time and request any errors be corrected. We sometimes have to transport files in our cars. We will aim to have them in our cars for a short period of time, between the session location and where it will ultimately be stored.

In the unlikely event we are unable to provide psychological services due to unforeseen event such as a sudden illness or death, then Jennifer McIntee-Leinweber, Christine Cimolai, Jolene Siemens, Karli Alm, Carlin Olynyk or Kristy McConnell (depending on your therapist), will assume full responsibility for each other's business until it can be closed or settled by our respective estates. We may contact clients to inform them of their options for psychological care and to let them know where their file will be stored until it is legally possible to destroy it. If clients are not accepting of this protocol we have established, we as that the client please let us know so we can find a workable solution.

Session notes are crafted with the primary goal of offering therapeutic support and continuity of care rather than providing objective, verifiable information. Consequently, we are unable to fulfill requests for a letter that could be utilized as evidence in legal matters. If there are specific aspects of our sessions that clients believe could be useful, we recommend consulting with your legal representative on alternative approaches to obtain the necessary documentation for their case. Please feel free to discuss any concerns or questions about this matter during the next therapy session.

Phone Calls, Online Sessions and Social Media

Please be advised that psychologists do not provide clinical services via text or e-mail as these are not secure forms of communication, though some clients choose to use text and e-mail for the purposes of scheduling appointments. If clients initiate contact with a psychologist electronically, the client is consenting to the psychologist responding to or engaging in contact with the client or potential client via the same method, though the psychologist may choose not to do so at their discretion. Also please note that though OBP uses social media for marketing and frequently attends community events at which the psychologist identifies as a psychologist, the psychologist does not engage with existing clients on social media and will not disclose the nature of the relationship to any clients seen at events, in order to maintain confidentiality. If clients found services via social media, clients understand that the psychologist will not engage with clients on these public forums.

Telehealth services include phone and secure online video sessions, which may be utilized in the event that clients or the psychologist cannot meet in person due to illness, scheduling conflict, difficulty coming to the office due to distance/traffic, or for other reasons. By signing the Consent for Treatment form, clients agree that any telehealth services engaged in are voluntary and provided for convenience, and that all the same fees apply for telehealth as for in-person sessions. Clients also understand that their psychologist will make every effort to

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provide a secure experience, but that security of electronic communication can never be guaranteed. The client accepts any risks associated with engaging in telehealth services. Please be advised that telehealth services are not always appropriate for every client and that the psychologist reserves the right to refuse telehealth if the psychologist feels it is not clinically appropriate or could be harmful to the client. For telehealth sessions, payment will be processed via credit card.

Fees, Cancellation, No Shows or Arriving Late

We are able to direct bill for some employees who have some third-party health insurance coverage; however, clients need to be aware of the considerations and limitations to confidentiality should they choose this option. Firstly, clients are always responsible for full payment of service. If we direct bill for client service and it does not cover the full amount, the clients are responsible for the remaining invoice amount. Also, we have to report some limited information to insurance companies about the nature service. Ask us about this at any time, but it is important that clients know they give up some confidentiality when they choose direct bill. If clients would like to pay for your service and would like statements for insurance reimbursement, please check with the insurance company to ensure benefits prior to the start of treatment. An invoice will be provided at the end of each session. If we are contacted by an insurance company regarding confirmation of session attendance and fee, please know that there is no privacy associated with an invoice or receipt that is shared with a third-party, such as an insurance company. The fee for a 50-minute counselling session is \$220.00 based on the recommended fee schedule from the Psychologists Association of Alberta (please note that sessions for couples typically require additional time and are booked for 80 minutes). Additional report writing, telephone consultation, letters and forms completed outside of the session will be billed in 10-minute increments, calculated at one-fifth the hourly rate, at our discretion. The fee will be processed using Jane after the session unless another arrangement is made. We accept e-transfer, cash, credit cards, and debit. Jane and Square have their own user agreements, which indicates they may store and use some identifying information such as your name and email address, as do many credit card processing services. If you prefer to not use a credit card to pay, you may pay with cash or e-transfer. Our accountants (we can supply clients with the name, if asked) will have access to client contact information, appointment times, payment information, and receipt information for billing, tax filing, and statistical purposes. The accountant will not know why you sought our help since s/he cannot access the clinical portion of your file.

A regular session fee will be charged for appointments that are missed or cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice. In the case of repeated missed appointments or late cancellations, clients will also have to store credit card information in Jane. This fee will be processed using your stored credit or debit information. We require 24 hours' notice so that we have enough time to contact a client on the cancellation list. The 24-hour cancellation fee may be waived in extraordinary circumstances at the psychologist's discretion; however, this does not

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include bad weather. If clients do not want to head outdoors, we can meet at our office, online, or at another mutually agreed upon location. If clients are late for a session, they can come anyway! If we are meeting on the trails, we will wait for 15 minutes prior to leaving. Clients will be billed from the time the session was originally scheduled to start.

Should clients fail to maintain payments for service for more than 60 days and other arrangements for payment have not been made, legal means, including the use of a collection agency or small claims court, may be used to collect unpaid dues, in which case such costs will be included in the claim. If this happens, we may have to disclose client's name, nature and date of services, and amount owed to the appropriate agents. Clients are responsible for paying the penalty charged by our bank for returned cheques.

Contact Between Sessions

Clients are welcome to leave a confidential voicemail, and the psychologist will do their best to return all phone calls within 24 hours of a business day. In the case of emergencies that require a more immediate response, such as suicide, the first thing you should do is call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room. Other options may include:

- Distress Centre Calgary- 403-266-4357 (HELP) 24 hrs/day
- Airdrie Urgent Care- 403-912-8500
- AHS Mental Health Helpline- 1-877-303-2642

Hours of Operation

OBP psychologists work varying schedules, each determined individually. In addition, there are times when the psychologist may need to reschedule sessions, sometimes on very short notice, due to family or private practice responsibilities that suddenly come up.

Ending or Terminating Therapy

Usually, the psychologist and client will work together to determine how often clients will attend, what the therapy goals are, and when treatment will end. If clients decide independently to end treatment, it is customary to schedule a session to discuss this. If the psychologist is ending treatment with the client, due to failure to comply with the mutual agreement, the psychologist will attempt to discuss this with the client in session or by phone and provide the client with the name of another psychologist they can contact. At this point, OBP would no longer be the client's provider. There may also be circumstances where it might be helpful to refer clients to another psychologist in order to explore other treatment strategies. Should clients require a referral to another psychologist, the psychologist will provide the client with some alternative names that can be contacted. If clients are unhappy with services, the psychologist will listen carefully to the concerns, and attempt to repair the

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situation. If a client is still not satisfied, they have the right to contact the College of Alberta Psychologists. Please note that if a client makes a complaint, the psychologist reserves the right to share information about the client and/or the client's counselling services to defend or explain the psychologist's actions.

Engaging in Walking or Running Therapy

In consideration of being accepted to participate in Off the Beaten Path Psychology and Wellness services, which may include running, walking or other related activities while engaging in talk therapy with OBP psychologists, clients will be expected to sign a waiver that will:

- Waive any and all claims against Kristy McConnell and/or Off the Beaten Path Psychology and Wellness ("Service Providers").
- Release the Service Providers from any and all liability for any personal injury, accidents, illnesses, death, property damage or property loss which may arise from or be related to participation in Off the Beaten Path Psychology and Wellness services, notwithstanding that the injury, illness, death, damage or loss may have been caused solely or partly by the Service Providers' negligence.
- Hold harmless and indemnify the Service Providers from any and all claims, actions, suits, procedures, costs, expenses, damages and liabilities, including attorney's fees, brought as a result of my involvement with Off the Beaten Path Psychology and Wellness services.

Services Provided to a Minor

In accordance with the College of Alberta Psychologists standards of practice, parental written consent or that of the guardian is required and must be documented for the provision of psychological services to a minor. Normally, consent from only one of the parents is acceptable. However, when the parents are separated or divorced, the psychologist must inquire who has legal guardianship of the minor. The psychologist will also, when appropriate, seek consent from both parents. Further information on these services can be reviewed by accessing the "Client Terms of Agreement" form and the "Agreement for Parent" form.

Assent will also be sought from the minor who will be receiving psychological services. The provision of service and limits to confidentiality will be discussed with everyone.

Couples Therapy

Couples therapy has some unique considerations that can be reviewed by accessing the "Top 10 Things to Know About Couples Therapy" document.

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Supervisees

Supervisees agree to read and sign the procedures outlined in the *Supervision Services Provided by OBP Handout*. The handout outlines risks and benefits to supervision, schedule and contact considerations, fees, and expectations.

Supervisees agree to come prepared to supervision sessions with their consultation forms, and the *Agenda and Summary Log for Supervision* form found in Appendix E of the supervisee's handout.