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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 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**

**Therapist-** the psychologist that is supporting the client

**Client-** the person seeking psychological services

**Third-party health insurance-** the insurance company that pays the therapist 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 the therapist and client relationship maintains healthy boundaries to show respect to each other. For example, the therapist cannot accept gifts from clients or discounts from client business. Therapists cannot have more than one role with their clients (i.e. become friends). This means that if client and therapist find themselves in a "dual relationship" (e.g. joining the same running group by coincidence), they will need to discuss this so that both know what to expect. Kristy McConnell also works as a school psychologist, and as such, she may ask clients questions to determine if there may be a conflict of interest in working together.

Privacy is important to the therapist. What is discussed in session is confidential. Therapists need written permission to talk to others about the work done together. However, there are circumstances when therapists need to ask for extra help from others in order to support clients. If therapists consider communication with someone else (e.g., a physician, school personnel), therapists will ask for written permission from the client. That being said, if a client becomes ill or injured during a session, the therapist might need to call the clients' emergency contact for help. *There are also legal exceptions to the confidentiality agreement. Therapists 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 self or others; or 3) grave disability. In case of a subpoena from a court of law, the therapist may be required to answer questions and submit files. The*

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*client should let the therapist know if this might be a possibility, and the therapist will do their best to prevent the release of a client file. Therapists also reserve the right to report any abuse of animals to authorities. As well, if clients share information about past or present illegal activities or tell the therapist about professionals (e.g., counsellors, nurses, teachers) whom they believe have acted unethically, the therapist reserves 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. Therapists will always strive to tell clients what action may need to occur on these issues. Clients can ask questions about any of this at any time!*

In order for therapists to offer clients the best possible service, therapists may need to seek consultation from other therapists. In these circumstances, therapists will honour your privacy by not using your name. Because all therapists adhere to codes of ethics concerning confidentiality, they are legally bound to keep the information confidential. If clients would like, they can be provided with information about the therapists with whom are consulted.

With regard to sessions where clients bring another person, such as a spouse, things can become complicated! Part of this work might mean that the therapist shares information about the client with the other person during the session. With the exception of information that clients and the therapist have previously agreed to not discuss in the session with the other person, the therapist reserves the right to use professional discretion regarding what to share and when.

#### Client Records and Communications

Records (including assessment/evaluation and scant details about session content) will be protected in a locked box for paper files and on a password-protected, encrypted computer for electronic records. The therapist will also keep your contact information on a smart phone, which is password protected. If the therapist's phone or computer is lost or stolen, the client will be informed immediately. The therapist will need to retain personal health information of clients for some time in order to ensure that the therapist can answer questions clients might have about services provided as well as for the therapist's 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 the therapist hires. Digital records are permanently and securely deleted from the devices on which they were stored. Clients have the right to ask for a copy of their file at any time and may request any errors be corrected. We also sometimes have to carry client records in our cars. We will only keep them in their car for transport between the therapy location and the file cabinet where it will ultimately be stored. Psychologists within OBP also share an office with Cheryl Placsko, another psychologist, who have access to the Airdrie office and filing cabinet. We are all held to the same confidentiality standards.

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In the unlikely event the therapist is unable to provide psychological services due to unforeseen event such as a sudden illness or death, then a longtime colleague within OBP will assume full responsibility for the business until it can be closed or settled by the therapist's estate. The colleague chosen 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 a client is not accepting of this protocol established, please let the therapist know in order to find a workable solution.

#### Phone Calls, Online Sessions and Social Media

Please be advised that therapists 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 therapist electronically, the client is consenting to the therapist responding to or engaging in contact with the client or potential client via the same method, though the therapist 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 therapist identifies as a therapist, the therapist 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 therapist 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 therapist 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 therapist will make every effort to 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 therapist reserves the right to refuse telehealth if the therapist 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

OBP is able to direct bill for some employees who have third-party health insurance coverage; however, the client needs to be aware of the considerations and limitations to confidentiality should this option be chosen. Firstly, the client is always responsible for full payment of the service. If the therapist direct bills for a client's service and it does not cover the full amount, the client is responsible for the remaining invoice amount. Also, the therapist may have to

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report some limited information to the insurance company about the nature of the service. Ask your therapist about this at any time, but it is important that the client knows that they give up some confidentiality when they choose direct bill. If the client would like to pay for the service and would like statements for insurance reimbursement, the client should check with the insurance company to ensure their benefits prior to the start of treatment.

An invoice will be provided at the end of each session. The fee for a 50-minute counselling session is \$220.00 (as of Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023) 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 75 minutes or 1.5 sessions at a time). Additional report writing, telephone consultation, letters and forms completed outside of the session will be billed in 15 minute increments, calculated at one-fourth the hourly rate, at the therapist's discretion. The fee is to be paid at the time of each session. OBP accepts cheques, cash, credit cards, and debit. OBP currently uses Square© to process credit card and debit payments. Square's user agreement indicates they may store and use some identifying information such as the client's name and email address, as do many credit card processing services. If the client prefers to not use a credit card to pay, they may pay with cash or cheque. OBP's accountant (OBP can supply clients with the name, if asked) will have access to client's contact information, appointment times, payment information, and receipt information for billing, tax filing, and statistical purposes. The accountant will not know why clients sought help since they cannot access the clinical portion of the client 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, the therapist may ask the client to provide a credit card on file to maintain treatment. For clients using Square, this fee will be processed using stored credit or debit information. OBP requires 24 hours' notice so that there is enough time to contact a client on the cancellation list. The 24-hour cancellation fee may be waived in extraordinary circumstances; however, this does not include bad weather. If a client does not want to head outdoors, sessions can be online, or at another mutually agreed upon location. If a client is late for a session, they are encouraged to come anyway! If the client is meeting the therapist on the trails, the therapist will wait for 15 minutes prior to leaving. You will be billed from the time the session was originally scheduled to start.

Should a client 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, the therapist may have to disclose the client's name, nature and date of services, and amount owed to the appropriate agents. This client is responsible for paying the penalty charged by the bank for returned cheques.

#### Contact Between Sessions

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Clients are welcome to leave a confidential voicemail, and the therapist 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

Since Kristy McConnell, and other OBP psychologists also works within school divisions, Kristy's schedule for therapy and supervision is generally based around this schedule. In addition, there are times when the therapist 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 therapist 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 therapist is ending treatment with the client, due to failure to comply with the mutual agreement, the therapist will attempt to discuss this with the client in session or by phone and provide the client with the name of another therapist 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 therapist in order to explore other treatment strategies. Should clients require a referral to another therapist, the therapist will provide the client with some alternative names that can be contacted. If clients are unhappy with services, the therapist will listen carefully to the concerns, and attempt to repair the 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 therapist reserves the right to share information about the client and/or the client's counselling services to defend or explain the therapist'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 therapists, 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").

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- 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 therapist must inquire who has legal guardianship of the minor. The therapist will also, when appropriate, seek consent from both parents.

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.

#### 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.