

Privacy Policy:

I. Introduction

All Wecounsel counselors are professionals and before joining the Wecounsel network are rigorously screened to ensure that our clients have access to only the highest quality mental health care. Our providers all adhere to the ethical codes of their respective licensing or professional organizations. However, the online world has some unique concerns in addition to the ethical issues present in traditional face-to-face settings. At Wecounsel, we require that our counselors have ethics and professional behavior above reproach. All of our counselors are required to follow the American Psychological Association's [Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct](#). In addition to the ethical standards of traditional psychology, at Wecounsel, we have additional ethical guidelines.

II. Counselors must have a mastery of the technological tools of online counseling. Encryption and Information Security

Counselors must understand how to use encrypted services for communications and records. Counselors must use highly secure passwords and change them regularly. Any records stored on either the cloud or on physical storage media must be encrypted and secured against unauthorized access. Counselors are prohibited from storing or transmitting client data on any network with less than 128 bit encryption, with 256 bit encryption encouraged. Physical storage devices such as a computer hard drive, USB or mobile device must be stored in a locked location with precautions taken against any unauthorized physical or electronic access. Any WiFi networks used must be encrypted. Using public, shared computers is never permitted, regardless of security or encryption tools used. If a counselor uses a laptop computer, it must have a master password enabled along with special attention paid to the computer's physical storage and security.

Backup Systems

All Wecounsel providers are encouraged to use secure, cloud-based systems for records backup. At the minimum, all client records must be physically backed up on an external storage device which is then stored in a locked, secure location. Counselors are encouraged to backup their client files on a daily basis, but are required to back up at least weekly. Paper printouts of any patient records are highly discouraged.

Passwords

Passwords must be changed regularly. All counselors are required to change their Wecounsel passwords monthly and are encouraged to change any passwords related to client records at least monthly. Passwords must be at minimum 11 characters long with both upper and lower case letters, at least 2 different numbers and 2 special characters. Any variation of the counselor's name, social security number, address, etc. must not be used. Counselors are prohibited from storing their Wecounsel password on their computer.

Firewalls

Counselors must ensure that they use appropriate firewall protection to ensure no unauthorized network connections to their computer.

Virus Protection

Counselors are highly encouraged to use Mac OS or Linux systems to minimize security vulnerabilities. Windows users are required to use up-to-date anti-virus software and download the most current Windows security updates within 1 week of release. Counselors are also encouraged to avoid any websites of a questionable or risky nature. All counselors, regardless of computer operating system, are highly discouraged from using any public, peer-to-peer file sharing services. Wecounsel will stay current on security risks for counselors and users and inform the Wecounsel community as appropriate, however all counselors have the ultimate responsibility of ensuring their machine is safe and secure.

Hardware

Counselors must be comfortable and familiar with their particular hardware.

Software

Counselors must be comfortable with both the Wecounsel platform and any software necessary to assist clients during therapy.

Third-Party Services

Counselors must not use any third-party software or services for Wecounsel online counseling that has not been approved by Wecounsel. Certain tools are prohibited because of known or potential security issues as well as the user experience of clients. Counselors must never require a client to use a particular software or service that has not been approved by Wecounsel.

III. Counselors must work only within their scope of practice.

Scope of Practice indicates the specific area in which a counselor may practice. Counselors may not practice within an area for which they are not trained and/or licensed. Counselors must follow the laws and professional regulations for their locale. Clients seeking treatment for a counselor licensed outside of their physical location are considered "visiting" the counselor in the counselor's home location. Counselors are required to answer any questions about their qualifications, training and/or licensing so a client can be fully informed. Counselors are expressly prohibited from providing any service for which they are not qualified or legally allowed to provide.

IV. Counselors must ensure that their skills are current.

Counselors must stay current within their professional area. This includes receiving any required continuing education training. Counselors must keep abreast of significant research within their field and be able to employ new training, knowledge and research towards the betterment of their clients. Counselors must keep their licenses and certifications current as required by their local jurisdiction.

V. Counselors must be prepared for client emergencies

While Wecounsel strives to provide relevant emergency information for each client's location, counselors must take responsibility for their client's safety. Counselors are encouraged to be familiar with the emergency and crisis resources for a particular client's location. Emergency contact information is collected from every Wecounsel client; counselors must be knowledgeable on how to use emergency information, regardless of client location. For example, if a client in the UK is seeing a US counselor, that counselor should be familiar with how to dial a UK emergency contact's phone number in the event of a crisis. The counselor should also take advantage of emergency and crisis resources provided by Wecounsel for each client location. Counselors should have a telephone

available in the event of a network or hardware failure in order to ensure that a client is not abandoned. The safety and security of Wecounsel clients is the highest priority.

VI. Counselors must use appropriate Informed Consent.

Counselors must ensure that all of their Wecounsel clients complete and sign an Informed Consent. This can be done electronically using a digital signature service such as [Right Signature](#), or it can be through a printed, signed and scanned document. Counselors must keep encrypted digital copies of any documents submitted by clients and must provide a copy of the document in PDF format to the client. Microsoft Word documents are highly discouraged due to their ability to be easily altered and lack of universal compatibility. Right Signature is the preferred Wecounsel provider for legal, digitally signed documents. Counselors are not required, but are encouraged to use the Right Signature service to ensure that clients are able to easily read and sign informed consent documents. Regardless of method, an informed consent is absolutely necessary. Wecounsel has sample informed consent forms for counselor use, however the ultimate responsibility for informed consent compliance lies with the counselor. Minor children **MUST** have a parent or legal guardian sign an Informed Consent before ANY consultation or treatment can begin.

The Informed Consent must include information about the counselor's jurisdiction and licensing and inform the client that the session will be conducted under the laws of the counselor's specific jurisdiction. The Informed Consent must inform the client that the laws and regulations within the counselor's jurisdiction may be different than the laws within the client's jurisdiction.

VII. The Counselor is the Owner of the Record

Wecounsel does not store, maintain or transmit client records other than the initial sign up screening form. Wecounsel does maintain a payment history, however no other treatment data is collected by Wecounsel. The counselor is the legal owner of the medical records created and generated from treatment. Counselors must comply with any medical records release requests by a client or legally authorized entity. Counselors must maintain patient records as required by law within their jurisdiction and make available any records if requested by a client. No records shall ever be released without a written release from the client or client's legally authorized agent.

VIII. Counselors should be insured.

Counselors should ensure that they are covered by any required malpractice insurance if required by their local jurisdiction. All counselors are encouraged to maintain appropriate levels of malpractice insurance coverage.