

## THE SOZO CENTER

### OFFICE INFORMATION, CLIENT'S RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES and INFORMED CONSENT FOR TREATMENT

Welcome to our office. We trust that your visits here will be helpful. A clear understanding of our office policies, your role and responsibilities and our role and responsibilities will help you benefit from your efforts here. Please read what follows carefully. Feel free to ask us any questions that you may have.

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** The information you and/or your child share with your therapist is confidential. That means that information about you and your child cannot leave our office without your permission, except in situations as noted below. Should you want us to share information with any other professional, we will ask you to sign a form giving us permission to do so. Your therapist will discuss with you our policies regarding confidentiality. Some information about children needs to be shared with parents in order to develop treatment plans, ensure the safety and well-being of youths, and to keep parents informed about treatment progress.

Some limitations to confidentiality are as follows:

1. As in all states, Tennessee has a mandatory child abuse reporting law. This law *requires* us to make a report to the Department of Social Services whenever we have reason to *suspect* child abuse. Your permission for such a report is not required. Similar reporting requirements relating to the abuse of elderly and/or disabled individuals may also apply.
2. If there is clear intention on your part to do serious harm to yourself or to someone else, we will share that information appropriately in an attempt to prevent that harm from occurring.
3. There have been instances in which therapy records have been subpoenaed to court. There are circumstances under which we would be held in contempt of court if we do not provide records and/or an opinion for the court.

**OFFICE HOURS:** All visits are by appointment only. Office hours vary according to the therapist you are seeing. Please discuss this with your therapist.

## FEE PAYMENT & INSURANCE

Payment is due at the time service is rendered. All therapists accept checks and cash and some of our therapists accept Visa, Mastercard and Discover. Please ask your therapist regarding credit cards. We reserve the right to suspend treatment if you have an outstanding balance or until you have made a significant payment toward your balance. **Fees for service vary according to your therapist. Please ask your therapist for their specific fee structure.** Psychological testing fees are variable and will be discussed with you if testing is recommended. Special services, such as school visits, are billed at the hourly rate, including travel time.

**Some of our therapists offer insurance filing. Please inquire of your therapist.** If you wish not to use your insurance, we gladly provide fee for service. If you wish to use your insurance **and we are participating providers for your company**, we will obtain the billing information from you that is necessary for us to bill your insurance company. You will be responsible for paying any co-payment required at each visit. You are responsible to pay in full for services not covered under your insurance policy. We urge you to become familiar with your insurance policy and the mental health services that are covered. While we will verify your coverage, you are ultimately responsible for knowing which services are covered. **If we are not participating providers with your insurance** we ask that you pay in full for services and we will provide you with the necessary information for you to file a claim to your insurance. Please inquire about "out-of-network" insurance filing. **It is your responsibility to notify us immediately of any change in employment, insurance coverage, or, if paying out of pocket, any change in family income.**

**NON-DISCRIMINATION:** Our office does not discriminate against clients because of race, ethnicity, creed, gender, age, disability status, or financial status.

## CLINICAL STANDARDS AND THERAPIST

**CHOICE:** Each therapist at the SOZO Center is in independent practice. We are associated together in practice under the name "SOZO Center". You have the right to information concerning your therapist's education, training, skills and expertise. You have the right to know about other treatment options, to seek a different service provider, and to receive help finding another service provider if you request it while in treatment. If you are being treated by an intern in supervised training, you have the right to

know that and will be asked to sign a specific informed consent.

**SAFETY:** You are responsible for avoiding actions that could harm you or others (and for helping your child avoid such actions). It is your responsibility to tell your therapist if you or your child are having thoughts of harming self or other, or are engaging in or threatening to engage in dangerous behaviors, so that your therapist can help you take steps to keep you and your child safe.

**PHYSICIAN COLLABORATION:** You have the right to have your therapist collaborate with your physician about psychotropic (psychiatric) medications or other medical matters you would like addressed. You will need to sign a Release.

**INPUT INTO TREATMENT:** You have the right and responsibility to provide input into your treatment and to share in the treatment planning process.

**FULL PARTICIPATION IN TREATMENT:** It is your responsibility to attend sessions as recommended, to put forth your best effort, to urge your child to put forth their best effort, to participate actively in the process, to provide needed and requested information, and to follow treatment recommendations. It is your responsibility to inform us of any and all medications and substances you and/or your youth take and medication changes. Full participation may also include a referral to a physician for a medication evaluation, completing homework assignments, and trying new behaviors. If you do not agree with your therapist's recommendations or are dissatisfied with your treatment progress, it is your responsibility to say so, so that we can work on a plan we both believe to be workable.

**ENDING THERAPY:** It is your right and responsibility to have an ending to your therapy, in which we review your progress and say Good-Bye. It is in your best interests to consult with your therapist about ending therapy and to do so in a planned way. Prematurely stopping therapy is a major cause of limited results and/or relapse.

**EMERGENCIES:** Occasionally people have urgent needs necessitating an increase in appointments. These sessions can be made during regular hours, or even after regular office hours, if needed. If you or your child have a crisis after business hours, our after hours number is 865-603-2192.

If you have a mental health emergency that requires

immediate attention and cannot reach us after hours, please go to the emergency room at the nearest hospital or **dial 911** on your telephone.

**STAFF VACATIONS:** We will let you know in advance about scheduled absences from the office. It may be possible for you to see another therapist in your therapist's absence.

**CANCELLATIONS:** Failure to appear for your appointment and cancellations with less than 24 hours notice will result in a \$50.00 charge. There are several reasons why this policy is strictly followed: (A) Regular appointments are necessary for therapy to work. (B) Frequently, others would like to use the time set aside for you should it become available. Twenty-four hours usually gives people sufficient time to make arrangements. (C) Each appointment constitutes a significant portion of our schedule and proceeds.

*Exceptions:* When an illness or other emergency arises, we will not charge for a missed appointment. This exception is made at your therapist's discretion. Therefore you need to call as soon as you think you are getting sick so we can discuss the reasons for the missed appointment. Repeated missed appointments are not tolerated.

## **QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS ABOUT COUNSELING SERVICES**

**WHAT IS COUNSELING?** Counseling is the process by which individuals examine and study their own behavior. It is designed to help adults, children and families build skills and solve problems by making changes in thoughts, feelings, behaviors, and relationships. In addition, clients often make spiritual changes, the most powerful change any of us can make. The primary work in therapy is yours. Your therapist is a guide, and advocate, who helps you and your children sort out your problems and build needed skills, especially in those areas which have resisted other efforts.

**WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE SEEK COUNSELING?** All kinds of people seek counseling. Everyone faces problems throughout their lives. Contrary to popular belief, no one easily solves all their problems. Today, it is even harder because we live in such a complex and demanding society. It is common now to be faced with problems we have had no chance to prepare for and never expected. When that happens, our coping skills can get overwhelmed, leading to "symptoms" of distress in various forms.

Examples include:

- feeling deeply discouraged and defeated
- doing poorly at school
- having problems getting along with people you care about
- getting anxious about the wrong things
- getting *too* anxious about the right things
- doing things that we do not understand
- having habits that hurt us
- spiritual confusion

In fact, there are as many signals of inadequate coping skills as there are people. Regardless of the nature of the symptoms that lead someone to call about themselves, their marriage, their family or their child, the symptoms point the way to the troublesome areas. Symptoms can be understood as a way people have of trying to solve their problems. Every human being has problems at some point in their life, and usually at several points over the years. Getting help as soon as one thinks there may be a problem helps reduce problems later on.

Some people have misgivings about counseling. They believe it is for seriously disturbed people only. It is true that many counseling techniques were developed in response to people who were having severe problems. However, today, these techniques are helpful to anyone struggling with problems that are not responding to other efforts.

**WHAT ARE THE GOALS OF COUNSELING?** The connection between *symptoms* and the underlying problem often emerges over time. One counseling goal is to understand better what conflict the individual is attempting to resolve with the identified behavior problem. Symptoms that lead people to seek counseling are ineffective ways of dealing with the problem and are usually quite painful. Another counseling goal is to develop better problem-solving strategies.

One major focus in assisting yourself, your child or family in their struggles is that of your spiritual life. We believe that it is in God's presence, through Christ, that the ultimate solutions to life are found, including a clear identity, peace, satisfying relationships, and fulfilled educational goals. We recognize that you and your family may not share our spiritual beliefs. You have our assurance that spiritual issues with you and your child will be handled in collaboration with you as their parent and that we will not force our beliefs, doctrines or a particular denomination on you or your family.

**HOW DOES COUNSELING WORK?** Counseling involves thinking and talking about one's life and problems. We pay attention to thoughts, feelings and behaviors that arise, both in and outside of this office. The effects of yours and / or your child's behavior on themselves, on others, and on situations are considered. We gather extensive history about you and / or your child and related family history. This information gathering phase of treatment may seem tedious, but is crucial for accurate diagnosis and treatment planning. For those who are open to it, we will incorporate Biblical Scripture, and prayer, if requested, into your sessions. We strive always to guide and instruct without judgment.

Sometimes people come to counseling hoping for a quick answer. While this is understandable, it rarely happens. Few people go to the trouble and expense of counseling without having tried hard to solve the problem on their own.

Some people wait for their therapist to solve the problem. This approach guarantees disappointment. Co-counseling is hard work. Sometimes we ask people to try out new ideas or new behaviors in session and at home. Answers to problems will be the result of our *mutual* exploration and effort. Once again, we believe that progress is made primarily through a closer relationship to God through Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit.

There are three ways you can increase the benefit of our work with you, your child, or family:

1. We urge you and your child to talk to us about those things you find hard to discuss. What you and your child want to discuss *least* is probably what we need to discuss *most*. The sooner we get to them, the faster we will finish. Issues "kept in the closet" tend to grow in the dark. Bringing them out into the light of day is a big step in making them manageable.
2. Being honest with us and yourself is essential. Being dishonest in therapy is like asking a CPA to do your taxes without letting him see your financial records. Honesty means, in part, talking with your therapist concerning your thoughts and feelings about the therapy process itself.
3. Complete the assignments given to you and supervise your child in completing assignments given to them. Changing one's thoughts, feelings or behaviors requires practice "in the real world", not just in the consulting room.

**IS COUNSELING EFFECTIVE?** Research shows that counseling is helpful to most people willing to invest the required effort. Sometimes, however, it is not. This can be for several reasons:

1. Poor rapport between you and/or your child and your therapist. If after a few sessions you do not feel comfortable, please discuss this with your therapist. We will try to work it out. If we can't, we will help you find someone better suited to you.
2. There may be a poor fit between the therapeutic method selected and yours or your child's problem or personality. If you feel this may be the case in our work, please say so.
3. There are some problems in living that are not changeable by therapy.

Counseling can be painful at times as issues long avoided or hidden are raised. This pain should not be endured for its own sake but only in service of your therapeutic goals. It is unrealistic to expect that you and your child will feel better after each session. There may be times when you and/or your child may leave feeling somewhat upset or anxious. If this happens regularly, however, please tell us.

**WHAT IS PSYCHOLOGICAL TESTING?** Formal psychological and/or educational testing often helps the therapy process by deepening our understanding of you and/or your child, and your family. Psychological tests are scientific instruments that have been constructed to help us understand an adult, child or adolescent's academic strengths and weaknesses, personality characteristics, worries, skills, and ways of coping. These tests have been given to hundreds of individuals in order to establish their validity, i.e., that they accurately measure what they are supposed to measure.

The results of the testing process can be thought of as a snapshot. Snapshots catch us at the moment. Some of what is seen will pass with the moment. Other features of the picture will be more enduring. In a similar way, testing reveals some aspects of our personality and behavior that are relatively temporary, things related to our situation or time of life. Testing can also reveal more enduring aspects of our personality and behavior.

**WILL I KNOW THE RESULTS?** Yes, we will take time to review what the tests suggest is true about you and/or your child. The tests we use are excellent but not perfect. Because they are created by people, there is always the potential for error. As

we review the results, we will be particularly interested in your sense of whether they "fit" you and/or your child and your experience of them in school, at home and with others. If not, a test error may have occurred. Alternatively, there may be some features of you or your child that you have not acknowledged. One useful aspect of testing is to give you and your child a chance to confront unacknowledged aspects of personality, academic skills and behavior. This often leads to enhanced problem solving. Review of test results is often useful in refining therapy goals.

We appreciate your cooperation with our office policies. Please sign the Informed Consent Signature Page now (next page). We look forward to working with you and your family in helping you achieve your counseling goals.

***The SOZO Center staff***

**THE SOZO CENTER  
OFFICE INFORMATION, CLIENTS' RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES AND  
INFORMED CONSENT FOR TREATMENT SIGNATURE PAGE**

I have thoroughly read and understood the document entitled *Office Information, Clients' Rights and Responsibilities and Informed Consent For Treatment*, have had opportunity to ask my questions regarding the content, and have received satisfactory clarification. Therefore, I hereby give my written consent for treatment of myself and/or my child.

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Client

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parent/Guardian signature (if client is a minor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Witness

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date: