

INFORMED CONSENT & PRACTICE POLICIES

BALBODHI WELLNESS

NATURE OF SERVICES

Counselling services are provided in a professional therapeutic relationship to assist clients in addressing issues by helping them identify strengths and needs, explore options, find solutions, make choices, locate information, provide resources, and promote coping strategies.

Psychotherapy services are provided in a professional therapeutic relationship to treat psycho-social or emotional difficulties, behavioural adaptations, and/or other problems of an emotional nature for the purpose of personal growth and development. This may include interventions addressing thought, cognition, mood, emotional regulation, perception, or memory that may impair an individual's judgement, insight, behaviour, communication or social functioning.

BENEFITS & RISKS

Counselling and/or psychotherapy provide a space to explore thoughts, emotions, sensations, behaviours, and relationships that may be causing difficulty in your life. Counselling and/or psychotherapy can be sources of support during a difficult time, creating opportunities for deeper personal insight and awareness, better understanding and coping with challenges, and assisting with changing problematic behaviours and improving relationships.

Sometimes, the counselling and/or psychotherapy process can be uncomfortable as it requires that you be willing to discuss personal information, which often coincides with experiencing strong emotions and sensations, examining thoughts, contacting difficult topics or memories from your life, and trying out new and different behaviours. The discomfort you may experience throughout counselling and/or psychotherapy is for the ultimate benefit of achieving your therapeutic goals. While some difficulties in

While some difficulties in life will improve with time or through other avenues that do not require counselling and/or psychotherapy, by choosing not to engage in counselling and/or psychotherapy at this time, you may find that what's causing difficulty in your life may not change or improve. That being said, engaging in counselling and/or psychotherapy is voluntary, and you can choose to discontinue counselling and/or psychotherapy at any time.

If you have questions about the pacing or intensity of the therapeutic process, please discuss them with your social worker/therapist.

COMMUNICATIONS POLICY

Your social worker/therapist aims to ensure a high level of professionalism and clarity concerning boundaries and communication, therefore the following outlines the expected and appropriate forms of communication between you and your therapist:

- **In-person** sessions are the primary mode for therapeutic discussions and sensitive information.
- **Email** is to be used as the contact mode outside of sessions, including scheduling, administrative inquiries, and sharing resources. Please avoid sharing sensitive personal information.
- **Phone calls** may be used for urgent matters, with your therapist's permission, where email is not appropriate or timely. Voicemails will be returned within 48 hours.
- **Text messaging** is not permitted unless your social worker/therapist specifies otherwise.

- Contact via **social media** is not permitted, and your social worker/therapist will not request nor respond to friending, following, likes, or other forms of engagement on any social media app or platform.

All content shared through all forms of communication is included in your client file and is considered confidential and subject to the limitations outlined in the Privacy and Confidentiality Policy.

Crisis & Emergencies

Your social worker/therapist will work with you to develop an appropriate safety plan when necessary; however, they cannot guarantee availability outside scheduled appointment times and, therefore, cannot respond to immediate crises or emergencies. If you are experiencing a mental health crisis or emergency, please contact emergency services by calling 9-1-1, access your nearest hospital emergency department, or call another known crisis support line:

London	Ontario	Canada
Reach Out 519-433-2023 1-866-933-2023 Chat: reachout247.ca	Telehealth 1-866-797-0000	9-8-8 Crisis Helpline Call or text: 988

Therapeutic Fit & Feedback

Sometimes, it may take a few sessions before determining that it is not a good therapeutic fit between you and your social worker/therapist. In this case, they will provide you with alternative referrals to explore.

If you are concerned about any aspect of your counselling and/or psychotherapy, you are encouraged to discuss this with your social worker/psychotherapist. Feedback may be provided verbally, in writing, or through a prepared feedback form, at the client's preference.

If this becomes impossible or unsafe, or if your concern is not resolved through discussion, you may contact the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers by email. For general inquiries, info@ocswssw.org. To file a complaint, investigations@ocswssw.org.

CONFIDENTIALITY POLICY

Your social worker/therapist collects personal health information to better understand you and your concerns, needs, and goals and to guide your treatment plan. No information will be released to a third party without prior written authorization. You have the right to withhold or withdraw consent to, or place conditions on, the disclosure of your information at any time (e.g., lock box principle).

Exceptions to confidentiality include the legal and/or ethical obligations of your social worker/therapist to:

- Inform a potential victim of a client's intention to harm them.
- Inform an appropriate family member, health care professional, or police, if necessary, of a client's intention to end his or her life.
- Release a client's file (or portions thereof) if there is an investigation or court order to do so.
- Inform the Children's Aid Society if there is suspicion of a child at risk of harm or in need of protection due to neglect, physical, sexual and/or emotional abuse.
- Report sexual abuse of a client by another regulated health professional.
- Report elder abuse of a resident in long-term care.

While these events are rare, they do occur. Your social worker/therapist's overall goal is to ensure you feel comfortable talking about your concerns, and they will first work with you to resolve these concerns, if possible. They will also consult other professionals for guidance on the therapeutic modalities they use to provide you with the highest quality care. Information provided in these other contexts will be anonymous. Finally, in a situation of the unexpected death or illness of your social worker/therapist, you may be contacted by a representative acting on their behalf. This representative will be obliged to ensure confidentiality and standards set out by the Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers and will provide you with a referral to alternative services.

RECORD KEEPING POLICY

Records are retained for at least 10 years from the date of the last interaction with the client or for 10 years from the client's 18th birthday, whichever is later. All information is maintained in compliance with the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA) of the Federal Government of Canada and the Province of Ontario's Personal Health Information and Protection Act (PHIPA). All personal information obtained, used, and disclosed in therapy sessions is done with your consent. Your personal information is protected by specific safeguards, including locked doors and cabinets, secure and encrypted practice management software (Jane), and computer and document passwords. You may request a copy of your records for a reasonable fee for the time spent preparing, copying and mailing the file (where applicable). Please note that records cannot be released when they contain the name of another person, and redaction of content is necessary to protect that person's confidentiality, and reports from other professionals cannot be released without the consent of that professional.

To access a copy of your record or to request corrections, please submit your inquiry in writing to britney@balbodhiwell.com. You will receive a response to your request within 30 days. There is no cost to correct your record.

PAYMENT & CANCELLATION POLICY

The full agreed-upon fee for service must be paid via credit card (Jane Payments/Stripe) or e-transfer (britney@balbodhiwell.com) immediately following your appointment. Please include the appointment date in your e-transfer message. A receipt will be provided for submission to your insurance company. Clients may elect to have their credit card information securely stored electronically on file for ease of payment.

Service Fees:

- **60-minute individual therapy session:** \$150 (HST exempt).
- **Time adjustments:** If more or less time is required for an appointment, clients will be charged to the nearest 15-minute increment per the hourly rate (\$37.50/15 minutes).
- **Requested documents:** the preparation and delivery of requested documents (e.g. letters of support, progress reports, etc.) are charged a flat fee of \$100/document. Any time required beyond one hour is then charged a prorated amount per the hourly rate.
- **Sliding scale:** Sliding-scale appointments are available for those experiencing significant financial hardship and/or marginalization. These appointments are limited and subject to availability. If this situation applies to you, please inform your therapist so they can send you further information.

Extended Health Insurance

Currently, the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) does not cover the cost of psychotherapy treatment. However, many private and extended health insurance plans offer financial benefits for counselling and

psychotherapy administered by a Registered Social Worker (RSW). Please refer to your private insurance plan and/or administrator for details on your available funding and if you require a referral from your primary healthcare provider to access these benefits.

Cancellations & Missed Appointments

A minimum of 24 hours' notice (48 hours preferred) is required to cancel or reschedule an appointment. No fee will be charged if the client's appointment can be rescheduled within the week or converted to a virtual appointment. This is subject to Britney's schedule and availability; therefore, appointments that cannot be rescheduled and are cancelled without the stated notice will be **charged the full fee**. Please be aware that insurance plans typically do not cover fees for cancelled appointments. The fee may be waived or applied as a credit for a future appointment based on compassionate grounds, for example, due to a sudden severe illness, an emergency requiring medical treatment, or a death in the family.

CONSIDERATION FOR TELEHEALTH SERVICES

Telehealth services are available to clients with access to appropriate technology and a stable internet connection and may be offered in-lieu of in-person appointments when appropriate.

Benefits & Risks of Telehealth Services

Telehealth services allow sessions to be conducted when in-person appointments are inconvenient or impossible and reduce the risk of illness transmission when the therapist or client pose an infectious threat but are healthy enough to complete a session. Despite best efforts to mitigate risks, telehealth appointments are subject to limitations, including threats to privacy, confidentiality, and security due to possible cyberattacks, receiving services in a public or unsecured location, technological failure, and distraction and miscommunication.

Telehealth Procedures

Only encrypted software (Jane Online Appointments or Zoom Workplace) will be used to conduct telehealth sessions. Access links to telehealth sessions will be sent via email to the client within a minimum of one hour of the appointment time unless otherwise agreed upon. Telehealth sessions will be conducted in a private setting, and both therapist and client must be informed of the possible presence or interruption by other individuals. A gesture or codeword may be used to discreetly signal the presence of others, when necessary. Both parties will refrain from recording telehealth sessions unless express consent is obtained. Any recorded material is considered confidential personal health information and will be handled as such.

Service Interruption to Telehealth Appointment

In case of a power outage or technological failure during a telehealth appointment, your social worker/therapist will allow five minutes to reconnect and then contact you at the phone number on file, provided the phone is in use and unaffected by the interruption, or via email to determine if the appointment may proceed over the phone. If an appointment is deemed appropriate to proceed over the phone, clients who choose to cancel are subject to the cancellation policy and fee. If it is deemed inappropriate to proceed over the phone, there will be no fee for the cancelled or rescheduled appointment.

Security Measures for Telehealth

Security procedures will be followed to protect client information and safeguard it against intentional and unintentional corruption, as per Ontario's Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA 2004) and Canada's Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act (PIPEDA 2019).

THERAPIST’S RIGHTS

If any policies herein are continually disrespected or a client’s conduct becomes harassing and abusive, your social worker/therapist maintains the right to discontinue services and terminate the professional relationship. A referral for alternative services will be provided.

STATEMENT OF INFORMED CONSENT

Informed consent for counselling and psychotherapy is essential to your right to choice and self-determination. Consent must be given voluntarily after reading and reflecting on all the information presented above. Consent is an ongoing process and you have the right to change your mind and withdraw your consent at any time, terminate treatment, or refuse a particular treatment approach or intervention if you are uncomfortable with it.

Signature spaces have been removed