



CONFIDENTIALITY AND PRIVACY POLICY

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PATHWAYS BIBLICAL COUNSELING CENTER
119 Habitat St, Americus, GA 31709

Pathways Biblical Counseling Center: Confidentiality and Privacy Policy

1. Purpose The Confidentiality and Privacy Policy is designed to protect the privacy of all clients at Pathways Biblical Counseling Center, ensuring that personal information shared during counseling sessions remains confidential. This policy outlines the center's commitment to ethical and legal obligations regarding the protection of client information while upholding biblical principles of integrity and trust (Proverbs 11:13).

2. Definition of Confidentiality Confidentiality refers to the ethical and legal obligation to keep information shared in counseling sessions private, protecting the client's identity and the content of their counseling sessions from unauthorized disclosure. Pathways Biblical Counseling Center is committed to maintaining this confidentiality to foster trust and openness in the counseling process.

3. Scope of Confidentiality

All information shared by clients during counseling sessions is considered confidential, including but not limited to:

- Personal information such as name, address, phone number, and other contact details.
- Details of the client's emotional, psychological, relational, and spiritual concerns.
- Counseling notes, assessments, and treatment plans.
- Any information discussed in the context of individual, group, marital, or family counseling.

This information will not be disclosed to anyone outside the counseling relationship without the client's written consent, except under certain circumstances as outlined in this policy.

4. Legal and Ethical Exceptions to Confidentiality

While the center is committed to maintaining confidentiality, there are specific situations in which confidentiality must be breached in accordance with legal and ethical obligations:

- **Imminent Risk of Harm to Self or Others:** If a client expresses a credible threat of harm to themselves (suicidal ideation) or others (homicidal ideation), the counselor is legally required to take steps to prevent harm. This may involve contacting emergency services, law enforcement, or notifying a third party to protect the client or others (Romans 13:1-4).
- **Child, Elder, or Dependent Adult Abuse:** If a counselor has reasonable suspicion that a child, elder, or dependent adult is being abused or neglected, the counselor is mandated by law to report this to the appropriate protective services agency. This includes any form of physical, sexual, or emotional abuse, as well as neglect (Proverbs 31:8-9).
- **Court Orders and Legal Proceedings:** In rare circumstances, a court may order the release of counseling records as part of a legal investigation or proceeding. Pathways Biblical Counseling Center will comply with such court orders after exhausting all legal avenues to protect client confidentiality (Romans 13:7).

- **Client Consent to Release Information:** If a client provides written consent to release information to a third party, such as a medical provider, family member, or legal representative, the counselor will disclose the specific information authorized by the client.

5. Confidentiality for Minors

For clients who are minors (under the age of 18), confidentiality will be maintained in accordance with legal and ethical guidelines, but there are additional considerations:

- **Parental Involvement:** Parents or legal guardians generally have the right to access their child's counseling records. However, the counselor may withhold specific details shared in session if disclosing them would harm the child or breach their trust.
- **Informed Consent for Minors:** Counselors will work with parents or guardians and the minor to establish clear expectations regarding confidentiality, helping both parties understand when information may be shared and when it will be kept confidential (Proverbs 20:5).

6. Privacy of Counseling Records

Pathways Biblical Counseling Center is committed to protecting the privacy and security of all counseling records. The following guidelines apply to the handling of client information:

- **Secure Storage:** All physical and electronic counseling records will be securely stored in compliance with state and federal regulations. Physical files are kept in locked cabinets, and electronic records are protected by password encryption and secure server access.
- **Record Retention:** Counseling records will be retained for the legally required period, which varies by state, after which they will be securely destroyed. Clients may request copies of their records in writing, and the center will provide these in accordance with applicable laws.
- **Limited Access:** Access to client records is restricted to authorized personnel only, including counselors and administrative staff involved in direct client care or record maintenance. All personnel are trained in confidentiality practices and are required to sign confidentiality agreements as part of their employment.

7. Client Rights Regarding Confidentiality

Clients have the following rights regarding their confidential information:

- **Right to Access:** Clients may request access to their counseling records and obtain copies in accordance with legal guidelines. Requests must be made in writing, and the center will respond within the legally required time frame.
- **Right to Request Amendments:** Clients have the right to request amendments or corrections to their counseling records if they believe that the information is inaccurate or incomplete. The center will review such requests and determine whether amendments are appropriate.

- **Right to Confidential Treatment:** Clients have the right to receive confidential counseling services and to be informed of any limits to confidentiality before beginning counseling.

8. Group Counseling Confidentiality

In the context of group counseling, confidentiality is essential to fostering a safe and supportive environment. Group members will be asked to sign a confidentiality agreement and commit to not disclosing personal information shared by other group members outside of the group setting.

- **Counselor Responsibility:** The counselor will maintain confidentiality regarding all group members but will remind the group that confidentiality among group members cannot be guaranteed.

9. Electronic Communication and Privacy

Pathways Biblical Counseling Center recognizes that electronic communication (e.g., email, text messages) can pose privacy risks. To minimize these risks:

- **Limited Use of Email and Text:** Email and text messages should only be used for administrative purposes (e.g., scheduling appointments). Clients will be informed that these methods are not fully secure and should not be used to share sensitive personal information.
- **Telehealth Sessions:** For telehealth (virtual) counseling sessions, Pathways uses secure, HIPAA-compliant platforms to protect client privacy during online sessions. Clients will be informed of the risks and benefits of telehealth before beginning virtual counseling.

10. Counseling in Church Settings

For clients referred by a local church or receiving counseling in a church setting, confidentiality will be maintained as in all other contexts. However, if the client's pastor or church leadership requests information about the client's progress, the counselor will only disclose such information with the client's written consent.

11. Breach of Confidentiality

If there is a suspected or actual breach of confidentiality, Pathways Biblical Counseling Center will:

- **Notify the Client:** The center will promptly notify the affected client(s) of any unauthorized disclosure or breach of their personal information, in compliance with legal requirements.
- **Investigate the Breach:** The center will conduct an internal investigation to determine the cause of the breach and implement corrective actions to prevent future occurrences.

12. Confidentiality Training for Staff

All counselors, staff, and volunteers at Pathways Biblical Counseling Center are required to undergo regular training on confidentiality laws, ethical standards, and privacy practices. This ensures that all personnel are fully informed about their responsibilities regarding client confidentiality (Proverbs 11:14).

13. Conclusion

The Confidentiality and Privacy Policy at Pathways Biblical Counseling Center reflects our commitment to maintaining the highest standards of confidentiality, privacy, and integrity in the counseling relationship. Our goal is to provide a safe and trusting environment where clients can openly seek healing and growth, knowing that their personal information is protected (Psalm 32:7).