Department of Psychology Psychological Services Center DeKalb, IL 60115-2828



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**INFORMATION FOR CLIENTS**

There are a number of laws to protect consumers of health care services and our community. We feel it is important for you to understand how these laws may influence you and the psychological evaluation or therapy you receive here.

Although there is a lot of information in this packet, we urge you to read it carefully and to ask any questions you have before you sign the form indicating that you have read and understood this information. If questions come up in the future, please discuss them with your clinician, your clinician's supervisor, or the director of the Psychological Services Center (PSC).

# WHAT IS THE PSC?

The PSC provides psychological services to the NIU and Northern Illinois area communities. It is the primary training center for graduate students in the clinical psychology program at Northern Illinois University. Most services are performed by advanced graduate students under the direct supervision of a clinical or school psychology faculty member, most of whom are licensed by the state. Services

are occasionally provided by a faculty clinician. Our goals are to provide clients with effective services, to provide graduate students with opportunities for professional learning, and to further our knowledge through the study of human behavior.

# WHAT SERVICES ARE PROVIDED AT THE PSC?

The primary services offered by the PSC are psychotherapy and psychological evaluation. We work with interpersonal problems, anxiety, depression, academic and adjustment problems, school problems, sexual difficulties, family and marital difficulties, and so forth.

Please note that we typically provide short to medium-term therapy (up to 20 sessions). Although we are open during the summer, we generally do not expect our clients to continue in therapy after mid May (the end of the spring semester). If you feel that you need long-term therapy, please discuss this matter with your interviewer at the intake and your therapist. Having a pre-established understanding about the length of therapy often helps both client and therapist use the time more effectively.

# HOW DO I SET UP AN APPOINTMENT?

Services are requested by calling the PSC Office Manager (815 753-0591) or by coming into the office which is located in the one story annex building in front of the NIU Psychology/Computer Science Building facing Normal Road. Office hours are Monday, noon to 8 p.m., Tuesday, 11 a.m.

to 7 p.m., Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. The first appointment is an intake, or a problem assessment session. We ask you to read several forms that describe our procedures and then give us your written permission to proceed.

During the first session, your intake worker will ask you about the problems you are experiencing, your current circumstances, and your background. The intake worker will attempt to answer your questions about our services. If we believe that another agency can serve you better, we will provide you with a referral.

# HEALTH INSURANCE PORTABILITYAND ACCOUNTABILITY ACT (HIPAA)

A federal law, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA), provides privacy protections for medical records and patient rights with regard to the use and disclosure of your Protected Health Information (PHI) used for the purpose of treatment, payment and health care operations. HIPAA requires that the clinic provide you with a Notice of Privacy Practices (the Notice) for use and disclosure of PHI for treatment, payment, and health care operations. The Notice of Privacy Practices explains HIPAA and its application to your personal health information in greater detail. The law requires that we obtain your signature acknowledging that the clinic has provided you with this information at the intake.

# WHAT DO PSC SERVICES COST?

There is no charge for your initial appointment with the intake worker. At that meeting, fees will be discussed. In general, NIU students are charged $5.00 per therapy session. Community clients' fees are based on a sliding scale (discussed at intake, maximum therapy fee is $65.00). If a faculty member is doing therapy, the standard fee is $100.00 per therapy hour. Most assessments cost between $200.00 and $700.00, depending on the work involved. Many people have health insurance policies that pay for part or all of therapy. The PSC is not able to bill directly to insurance companies. Clients may request a monthly statement from us to file with their own insurance provider and receive a reimbursement directly.

We do not want to turn away a person seeking therapy because of difficulty affording the standard fee. Therefore, we use a sliding fee scale based on income and number of dependents. Additional fee reductions can be requested for extenuating circumstances.

You will be given a copy of the fee agreement prior to the start of any charges. PSC policy is that clients pay the fee before each session unless other arrangements are made with your therapist. These arrangements are subject to the approval of the PSC director.

Please feel free to raise questions about your fees at any time. If your financial circumstances change, please let your therapist know so that an appropriate fee adjustment can be made.

# WHAT IF I AM AN NIU STUDENT?

NIU students are charged $5.00 per therapy session. All other services are charged according to the usual sliding fee scale. Students are charged for psychological testing, and for couple or family therapy. Charges may also be made for reports sent to agencies or educational institutions at the request of the student, and for special therapy programs.

# HOW WILL MY THERAPY BE INFLUENCED BY HAVING A GRADUATE STUDENT THERAPIST?

As a training center, we want to assure the quality of both the services we provide to you and the education we provide to our student therapists. All therapy is therefore recorded or observed so that proper supervision can be given. You will be required to sign a consent form which indicates your acceptance of this policy. If this is not acceptable to you, we will assist you in finding help elsewhere.

Our students do not provide services until our faculty supervisors feel they have adequate skills. When they begin seeing clients, they are carefully supervised by experienced clinical psychologists. Supervisors listen to or watch the audiotapes or videotapes of sessions, and they retain full professional and legal responsibility for the services provided. Supervision takes place in treatment teams composed of the supervisor, your therapist, and other student therapists in the PSC. This approach is our method for supervising specific cases and training our graduate student therapists in the delivery of mental health services. At times, your therapist may delay answering some of your questions to confer with the supervisor. In this way, you will get the added benefit of the supervisor's experience.

# WHAT HAPPENS TO THE RECORDINGS THAT ARE MADE?

Recordings are used by your therapist and the supervisor to plan and improve therapy. Portions of recordings may be played in treatment team meetings to help your therapist learn how best to work with you and help other therapists learn about therapy in general. They are then either taped over for the next session or destroyed.

# WHAT ABOUT CONFIDENTIALITY?

As clinical psychologists and psychologists-in-training, we respect your right to privacy and confidentiality. This includes your right to choose what you wish to discuss in therapy as well as your right to have this information protected from others.

We have both an ethical responsibility and a legal duty to protect the information you disclose in therapy. Your records are kept in locked files. They are not released to anyone without your written permission, unless it is required by law. At the end of 10 years, your records are shredded. You should be aware, however, that if you discuss the same matters with other people, besides your therapist, you may not have the same protections as you do with your therapist at the PSC.

To ensure that you know the limits of confidentiality, here is a list of some of the exceptions found in the laws of Illinois. Most of the exceptions may not apply to you.

1. All reasonable suspicions of current child abuse or neglect must be reported to the Department of Child and Family Services (DCFS) immediately. Psychologists can lose their licenses if this is not done.
2. If a client threatens to do harm to himself, herself, or others, the psychologist has a duty to try to prevent this harm. This may include contacting the person who may be in danger, a family member, the police, or a hospital.
3. In accordance with Public Act 099-0278, if you are a current student enrolled at Northern Illinois University, you have been given the opportunity to declare a mental health emergency contact person (noted in the PSC “Mental Health Emergency” form). If a client threatens to do harm to himself, herself, or others, the psychologist has a duty to contact the person designated as a mental health emergency contact.
4. Based on the IL Firearm Concealed Carry Law (FOID; Public Act 098-0063), clients who are determined to be a clear and present danger to themselves and/or their community, or who are determined to be developmentally or intellectually disabled, must be reported to the IL Department of Human Services FOID Mental Health Reporting System within 24 hours of determination.
5. To ensure the quality of service given, a therapist may consult with a supervisor, attorney, or fellow staff members at the PSC. These professionals are under the same legal requirements as your therapist to protect your privacy and confidentiality.
6. If you are involved in a court case and the court believes your clinical record is relevant to the case, the judge can order disclosure or inspection of your record. If you are involved in a court case and you (or your attorney) raise your mental state as a reason for illegal behavior, the court can order disclosure or inspection of your record. If you are involved in a homicide, the court may be able to access your record. If you sue your therapist or are a witness against your therapist for reasons related to your therapy, your therapist is allowed to introduce your records, but only in so far as they are relevant to defending against your charges. The same is true if your therapist has to use legal measures to collect unpaid fees.
7. If you come to therapy or for testing under a court order the court has a right to any information you disclose that is relevant to the court order.
8. If you are under age 12 (and in some cases under age 18), if you are mentally incompetent, or if you die, your parent, guardian, or estate may have a right to your files.
9. If a portion of your therapy is paid for by your insurance or by a governmental agency (such as DCFS), this agency may have a right to inspect your record. (Please ask for more information if you have questions about this.)
10. Records that have been masked so that client identity cannot be determined must be made available to agencies charged with monitoring educational and mental health facilities so that adequate standards of care can be maintained.
11. Anytime you sign a consent form for release of information, the information will be released, according to your instructions.

In addition, you have the right to read your file and to make any additions or corrections you feel are important. We are required to make these additions a permanent part of your record. You have a right to request a copy of your file; the file itself, however, is the property of the PSC. If you wish to read or get a copy of your file, please fill out a form procured from the PSC secretary. You will be charged a standard page rate for the cost of copies.

# IN GENERAL, DOES THE PSC OPERATE LIKE OTHER MENTAL HEALTH FACILITIES?

Yes, we try to make our training center as similar to mental health centers, private group practices, and medical school facilities as possible, except that much more supervision occurs. We have case conferences and treatment teams. We keep careful statistics and records. We have in-service training. Our staff members are constantly updating their knowledge.

# HOW DO YOU HANDLE EMERGENCIES?

If a problem arises that cannot wait until a regularly scheduled meeting, you may contact the PSC office manager during office hours to see if a special appointment can be arranged. If an emergency arises after office hours, you should call the University Health Service (753-1311 for NIU students) or the Crisis Line (1-866-242-0111 for non-students), and indicate that you are currently being seen at PSC. If you feel that you are experiencing an emergency, you should state that clearly during the phone call.

The PCS closes for a week or more during semester breaks and on all national holidays. We are closed on weekends. If there is an emergency at those times, please contact one of the numbers above.

Although we have an answering machine, no one checks this machine for messages during non-working hours.

# WHAT IF I NEED MEDICATION FOR MY PROBLEM?

We make referrals to either university or community psychiatrists when we feel clients may benefit from medication for a biologically-related mental health problem. We try to work closely with our medical colleagues to provide you with continuity of care.

# SHOULD I HAVE A MEDICAL CHECK-UP?

Physical or mental symptoms (such as depression, fatigue, weight gain) are sometimes caused by medical illnesses. If you have not seen a physician recently for a check-up, we urge you to do so to rule out a medical explanation and treatment for your problems.

# WILL I BE A RESEARCH SUBJECT?

The PSC routinely collects information about clients' symptoms, improvement, and satisfaction (see “Consent” forms in this packet). This information is used to plan specific services for you and to evaluate the effectiveness of our services for you and other clients. These records may be used anonymously in the future for a research study, with the permission of NIU's Institutional Review Board. At no time would you be identified. In addition, at times the PSC conducts studies for research or teaching purposes.

In these cases you will be asked to participate and be provided with information about the study. You will never be included in such a study without your written consent.

# WHAT SHOULD I DO IF I AM UNHAPPY WITH MY THERAPY OR FEEL THAT MY RIGHTS HAVE BEEN ABUSED?

We ask that you first raise this question with your therapist, if you feel capable of doing so. Part of what makes therapy effective is the ability to discuss such matters in a therapeutic way. Sometimes, however, this may feel too threatening. In this case, the fastest and best way to get satisfaction is to talk with your therapist's supervisor and/or the PSC director. Each of these persons has a responsibility to you to see that you are getting adequate therapy and protection of your rights. To arrange for such a discussion please contact the PSC director, Dr. Karen White, at 815- 753-0591.

In addition, you may take complaints to the Illinois Psychological Association (1-312-372-7610) or the American Psychological Association (1-202-336-5500 or 1-800-374-2721), which monitor the ethical practice of psychology for members of those organizations, or the Illinois Department of Financial and Professional

Regulation, Division of Professional Regulation, Complaint Intake Unit, 100 West Randolph, Suite 9-300, Chicago, IL 60601 (1-312-814-6910).