

# ***CLIENT HANDBOOK***



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## **NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY**

The services and facilities of FAMILIES FIRST COUNSELING & PSYCHIATRY are operated on a non-discriminatory basis. This policy prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, age, sex, national origin, marital status, disability, sexual orientation, economic situation, religion, or political affiliation with service delivery.

## GENERAL INFORMATION

### **Who We Are:**

FAMILIES FIRST COUNSELING & PSYCHIATRY is a multi-disciplinary team of mental health professionals, including psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses, and therapists, who have a wide variety of specialties. As needed, we coordinate with other resources such as inpatient and partial hospitalization programs along with other health care professionals.

### **What You Can Expect at Your First Visit:**

On the day of your first appointment you will be asked to fill out a number of forms. Some of these forms are for our business records, so it is important to **have your insurance card with you**.

Treatment begins with an evaluation. You will meet with a clinician who will ask you about the problems for which you are seeking help. The clinician will determine the services you need and whether our outpatient clinic will be able to provide those services. If we are able to serve you, the clinician will use the information you have provided to develop with you a recommended plan of treatment tailored to meet your individual needs. Every effort will be made to provide you with efficient treatment. The clinician doing your evaluation may continue as your therapist for ongoing treatment, may recommend another clinician with a different specialty to be your therapist, or may recommend some other type of approach for your difficulties. If we are not able to assist you, we will attempt to refer you to another source of care.

### **Appointments:**

We will make every effort to arrange appointment times that are at your convenience. In the event that you must miss a scheduled appointment, please call the office at least 24 hours in advance.

### **What Kind of Treatment Might be Recommended?**

- ✚ **Individual Therapy:** This type of treatment, in which you meet alone with your therapist, is what most people traditionally associate with therapy. However, other approaches, such as group therapy and/or medication, are becoming the treatment(s) of choice in many cases.
- ✚ **Family or Couples Therapy:** In such treatment the focus is on the relationships involved and finding new solutions to old problems.
- ✚ **Medications:** Often a person's problem involves chemical imbalances. For example, some types of depression are related to the way brain chemistry affects mood. In such instances, taking a specially prescribed medication may be very helpful.

- ✚ **Other Means of Treatment:** Treatment is not just what you do in the therapist's office. It may be suggested that you undertake outside activities such as reading, journal keeping, attending self help groups, nutrition, exercise, talking to a dietician, practicing desirable new behaviors, etc.

### **What Kinds of Clinicians Are There?**

- ✚ **Psychiatrist (M.D.):** This is someone who has graduated from medical school and has completed residency training in psychiatry. Only physicians can prescribe medication.
- ✚ **Psychologist (Ph.D. or Psy.D.):** Someone who has graduated from a doctoral program in psychology and completed an approved internship (FFCP does not have a psychologist on staff).
- ✚ **Social Worker (LCSW-C):** A person who has graduated from a master's level program in social work and has completed a period of post-graduate supervision.
- ✚ **Clinical Nurse Specialist (RN, CS):** A graduate of a master's level program in nursing specializing in psychiatry and has completed a period of post-graduate supervision.
- ✚ **Professional Counselor (LCPC):** A person who has graduated from a master's level program in clinical psychology or counseling and has completed a period of post-graduate supervision.
- ✚ **Intern Counselors:** Intern counselors are clinicians who are in a graduate level program for either clinical psychology or social work. While providing treatment services Interns receive supervision from a licensed clinical supervisor.

### **How Do You Get The Most From Your Treatment?**

- ✚ **Attend Scheduled Appointments:** It is necessary to be present to receive the treatment if you want it to be effective.
- ✚ **Speak Honestly:** You are not there to please the therapist; you are there to identify your problems and to work on them. Therefore, in order to receive the greatest benefit from treatment you need to be very open and honest in talking about your feelings, thoughts and your behavior, even if you view it as "bad" or "shameful."
- ✚ **Risk Trying Things the Clinician Suggests:** Often treatment involves some proposed changes. For example, suggestions could include speaking up and being more assertive, listening more, being less aggressive, getting a physical exam or a blood test, completing homework assignments, etc. Also, therapy usually involves suggested alternatives in how you think about yourself and the world. Change is difficult, but by your seeking help you are indicating that some changes might be useful to you. Talk with your therapist if you are having difficulty pushing yourself to replace old behaviors with new ones.

### **Length of Treatment:**

No one can accurately predict exactly how long it will take to meet your treatment goals. Some problems can be addressed in one or two sessions while others may take longer. Your insurance benefits may help determine the length of treatment since many health plans offer treatment for crisis-oriented brief therapy only. It may be best to define very focused goals and plan a short course of therapy targeted to those goals

## **Emergencies:**

If you experience an emergency situation where you feel an urgent need to talk to a professional, contact the FAMILIES FIRST COUNSELING & PSYCHIATRY office or clinician on call. If the outpatient clinic is open and your therapist is present, she/he will return your call. When the clinic is closed, in case of an emergency, contact 911 or depending on your county:

Prince George's County Crisis Response System at 301-927-4500.

Montgomery County Crisis Response System at 240-777-4000

Baltimore City Crisis, Information and Referral Line at 410-433-5175

Baltimore County Crisis and Referral Line at 410-931-2214

Howard County Crisis Team at 410-531-6677

(This procedure is not be used to discuss matters that can be handled at your next scheduled therapy sessions, nor should it be used to obtain medication refills.) However, if you feel that the situation is life threatening and requires **immediate** assistance, you should always go to the nearest emergency room.

## **Inclement Weather:**

The decision to close the outpatient clinic will be made by the Director. Clients are encouraged to call the office at 240-304-FFCP to ascertain if the office is open or closed. If needed, clients can call the outpatient clinic on the next business day to reschedule their missed appointment. There will be no charge for the missed visit or for a cancellation due to inclement weather.

## **Further Assistance:**

Our reason for being here is to help you. Please feel free to ask questions about these matters or any others pertaining to your treatment here.

## **Client Rights and Responsibilities:**

As a client of FAMILIES FIRST COUNSELING & PSYCHIATRY, you have the **right** to:

- ✚ Be treated in a courteous and dignified manner.
- ✚ Be met on time for your appointment or told of any time changes as early as possible.
- ✚ Take part in planning your treatment and setting your treatment goals.
- ✚ Receive appropriate treatment regardless of your sex, race, age, religion, national origin, disability, or how you choose to pay for care.
- ✚ Know your progress in treatment, either through talking with your therapist, or in some cases, reviewing your chart with your therapist.
- ✚ Have your questions about your therapy answered.
- ✚ Discuss your medication with your doctor. This includes how the medicine works, how it makes you feel, side effects, or any needed for medication changes.
- ✚ Find out in advance how much money you will be charged for treatment.

- # Know the names and professions of people treating you.
- # Have your treatment records and conversations with your therapist held in the utmost privacy and confidentiality provided by law.
- # Decide if you do not want to continue with treatment.
- # Not be subjected to physical, mental, verbal or sexual abuse.
- # Know that parents and legal guardians are responsible for children 16 years and under. All procedures regarding client rights and confidentiality apply to them.
- # Have a response within five working days to any complaint that you may have.
- # Refuse to participate in intrusive research or to be photographed by an employee, visitor or other patient.
- # Receive an understandable explanation of these rights at any reasonable time.
- # File grievance if you believe that any of these rights have been violated, using the Grievance Procedures you have been given.
- # Refuse medication.

As a client of FAMILIES FIRST COUNSELING & PSYCHIATRY you have the **responsibility** to:

- # Work with your clinician to plan your treatment and decide on the goals of your treatment.
- # Work to accomplish your treatment goals. This includes taking medication as prescribed.
- # Be honest with your clinician(s) in discussing anything related to your problems.
- # Tell your therapist and Psychiatrist how your medications make you feel. Tell them about the side effects from any medications you take.
- # Give correct information to the staff about your family income, your employment and your health insurance coverage. Immediately tell the administrative staff whenever there is a change in any of these.
- # Pay your fees at the time of your visit. Discuss any problems with your fees with the administrative staff.
- # Keep your appointment and be on time, since your appointment time is set-aside for you. If you are late, the time available for your session will be shortened. If you are more than 15 minutes late your therapist or doctor may not be able to see you at all. If you know that you will be delayed or that you will not be able to keep your appointment, please call. You may be charged for any sessions that you miss without giving 24 hours notice.
- # Let your clinician know if you are not doing well or if you are feeling worse.
- # Talk with your clinician if you are thinking about stopping your treatment. You may be ready to handle things on your own, or you may be facing a difficult spot in treatment and need some additional help dealing with it.

## **Grievance Procedures**

### **STEP 1**

If clients or family members have grievance or complaint concerning their treatment, bill or any other issue, they are first directed to discuss it with their therapist. They have the right to be seen within five working days. If the issue cannot be resolved to their satisfaction at this level, or they are unwilling to speak to the therapist for whatever reason, the next step may be taken.

### **STEP 2**

If discussion with the therapist does not resolve the issue, the client/family is then directed to voice the grievance to the Area Director. This request must be in writing and should include the client name, date of complaint, the nature of the complaint and steps that have been taken to resolve the problem. Clients who are unable to prepare the written statement can request that the Area Director assign a staff member who is not involved in the problem to assist in writing the complaint. They have the right to be or have a written response within five working days of receipt of the request.

### **STEP 3**

If the above steps do not resolve the problem, the client or family may contact the Medical Director, using the same written format as previously described above or call. The Medical Director will review the problem, meet with client, if needed, and prepare a written response within 10 working days. One copy of the response will be given to the client or family, with additional copies given to the Program Director, who will review the case and document their opinion concerning the situations.

## **Names and Addresses of Contact For Grievances**

Todd Christiansen, M.D.  
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7474 Greenway Center Drive, Suite 700B  
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Phone: 240-965-0076