

Remote Counselling Contract

- **What happens in counselling?** We won't give advice or tell you what to do. We are a person-centred agency, providing an understanding, safe and confidential place. We may use aspects of cognitive behavioural therapy to encourage linking thoughts, feelings and behaviours. It should be something you want to participate in. We won't judge you, people come for many reasons. Sometimes it's difficult to talk, this is normal; let your counsellor know so they support you safely. You will agree (and sometimes review) reasonable goals with your counsellor.
- **How will my sessions be delivered?** The shift-manager will initially contact you by phone/text. You decide if you prefer phone or video call sessions. Your counsellor can advise on setting up Zoom, you will need a guardian's permission to download the application if you are under 16. www.saferinternet.org
- **How many sessions will I have?** Our initial service offer is six to eight sessions. This is reviewed together around the fifth session.
- **How long are the sessions?** Sessions last for 45 minutes.
- **When are the sessions?** The day and time will initially be arranged with the shift manager. The aim will be to keep sessions to the same day and time each week.
- **Where shall I have my session?** We encourage you to find a private, safe, and quiet space. On a video call, ensure you are appropriately dressed and, if you are on your bed, sit upright rather than lying down. Ensure your counsellor knows your location. We do not deliver sessions if you're outside of the county.
- **What is the cost?** We are a charity and sessions are free of charge.
- **What is confidentiality?** Anything discussed stays within The Lowdown but there are some exceptions to this when we may need to share information; whenever possible, we will involve you in that decision. Reasons to share information may include: if something is said about terrorism, drug trafficking or money laundering or if there is a safeguarding concern where we think you, or someone else, may be at serious risk of harm. We may also discuss sessions with a counselling supervisor; this helps us think about our work and does not involve identifying you. If Lowdown staff see you outside of the organisation, they will not acknowledge you and only briefly respond if you say hello first. We do ask you don't record remote sessions and we do not record it either.
- **We ask that you...** are available for your session at the agreed day/time. Your counsellor will initiate the contact, if you do not respond after 10 minutes it will be marked as a missed session. Your counsellor may contact you by phone if you do not respond via video call. Your counsellor will still finish on time, even if a session begins late. Once you start regular sessions, you are expected to attend every week unless you have told us about a planned holiday when accepting the regular day/time slot. We cannot usually extend the number of sessions when there are absences. Counsellors will be calling you on a withheld number.
- **What if there are technical difficulties?** If you experience technical difficulties with a video call, your counsellor will revert to a phone call to complete the session (please ensure you have access to the phone we have contact details for). If you

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have issues accessing your session, you can call the office line on **01604 634385**, our admin staff will get a message to your counsellor immediately. Alternatively, you can text the shift-manager on the Lowdown mobile on 07957 515677

Please update us if your contact details change.

- **What if I can't make a session?** · If you can't make a session, please call 01604 634385 as soon as you can or text 07957 515677. If we are not notified of absences for 2 consecutive weeks, we close your slot and a new client starts.
- **What if my counsellor is unavailable?** Your counsellor will let you know in advance if they have planned breaks. If they are unexpectedly absent, we will let you know as soon as possible. You will not lose these sessions.
- **I think I know one of the Lowdown staff?** Please let us know. We will ensure that person does not access any details about you and your sessions.
- **What can I do if I am unhappy with the sessions?** Try and talk with your counsellor first. Be honest and please don't feel embarrassed; it will not put your sessions at risk. If you prefer, you can contact either the shift or clinical manager. Feedback forms are available on our website. We are an organisational member of the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) and work to their ethical framework - see their website for details: www.bacp.co.uk.
- **Do I need to come to the ending session?** It is important to attend a planned ending so you can review and reflect upon what you have worked on together.
- **What qualifications does my counsellor have?** All counselling-support workers hold a minimum Level 2 accredited counselling skills certificate. All clients are assessed by a Qualified Counsellor (min. Level 4 Advanced Diploma) and allocated to an appropriate intervention for the level of need, risk and urgency. Some counselling-support workers are students; this is explained in the first session.
- **How are my records stored and for how long?** Data is stored securely and confidentially and used ethically in line with General Data Protection Regulation guidelines and the Data Protection Act 2018. It is not shared outside of the agency without your consent, except as stated above. You have the right to ask for a copy of your personal information, free of charge, in an electronic or paper format. You also have the right to ask for an amendment should anything be incorrect (see our website for full policy details). Statistics regarding service-use may be required for reporting and funding purposes but are completely anonymised. Brief sessional records are securely stored, separate to identifying personal details, and kept until: 8 years after your last session date or your 26th birthday - whichever is later. Where an issue has been raised and logged as a safeguarding concern (whether just within the organisation or escalated and reported outside of the Lowdown) the safeguarding record will be securely retained for 40 years (or the operational lifetime of the agency, if shorter). However, clients may give written permission for destruction of these records either: 8 years after their last session date or their 26th birthday - whichever is later.

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