

## Counselling Contract

- **What happens in counselling?** We won't tell you what to do. We are a person-centred agency, providing an understanding, safe and confidential place to explore things troubling you. 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 about things, this is normal. Let your worker know so we can support you in a safe way. You will agree reasonable goals and may review these as sessions continue.
- **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 same day and time each week – you accept a slot that you know you can attend each week.
- **What is the cost?** We are a charity; sessions are free of charge.
- **What is confidentiality?** Anything discussed stays within The Lowdown but there are some exceptions when we may 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 when 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 the work we do with you and does not involve identifying you. For your privacy, if staff see you outside of the organisation, they won't acknowledge you and will only briefly respond if you say hello first.
- **We ask you....** to attend sessions on time. Your support worker will still finish on time, even if you arrive late. Once you start regular sessions, you are expected to attend weekly unless you have already told us about a planned holiday when accepting the slot. We cannot usually extend the number of sessions when there are absences.
- **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 call 01604 634385 or text 07957 515677 as soon as you can. ***If an absence is unnotified, OR, 2 sessions are missed (even with notification) we will close your file and a new client will be booked for these sessions.***
- **What if my support worker is unavailable?** Your worker 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 support worker 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 also available on our website. We are an organisational member of the British Association for Counselling and

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Psychotherapy (BACP) and work within their ethical framework. Please see their website for details: [www.bacp.co.uk](http://www.bacp.co.uk).

- **Do I need to come to the ending session?** It is important to attend a planned ending with your worker so you can review and reflect upon what you have worked on together. It values what you have learned and discovered and can help support changes you may want to make in your life.
- **What qualifications does my support worker have?** All counselling-support workers hold a minimum Level 2 accredited counselling skills certificate. All clients are assessed by a Qualified Counsellor (minimum Level 4 Advanced Diploma) and allocated to an appropriate intervention depending on level of need, risk, and urgency. Some counselling-support workers are placement students; they will explain this in the first session.
- **How are my records stored and for how long?** Data is stored securely and used ethically in line with General Data Protection Regulation guidelines and the Data Protection Act 2018. It is not shared without your consent, except as stated above.
- Notes for any service accessed within the agency are kept on the same database system. Should you access multiple Lowdown services these notes may be visible to a Lowdown worker; however, staff are ethically and legally obliged only to access notes where there is a relevant and appropriate reason to do so including, but not limited to: appointment booking, recording support and for safeguarding purposes. Staff's access to notes is recorded via an internal audit log that is routinely monitored; they are also bound by organizational confidentiality policies. Should you wish for your notes to be kept separate please email [rachelwelsh@thelowdownnorthampton.co.uk](mailto:rachelwelsh@thelowdownnorthampton.co.uk).
- You can ask for a free hard/electronic copy of your personal information. You can ask for an amendment if anything is incorrect (see website for full policy). Service-user statistics may be required for reporting and funding purposes. Brief sessional records are securely stored, encrypted and archived on a cloud database, and kept until 8 years after your last session date or your 26<sup>th</sup> 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 26<sup>th</sup> birthday - whichever is later.