

Remote Counselling Contract

- **What happens in counselling?** We won't tell you what to do. We are a person-centred agency, providing an understanding 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. 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 and ask if you prefer phone or video call. Your counsellor can advise on setting up Zoom, you need a guardian's permission to download 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. They will be the same day and time each week.
- **Where shall I have my session?** A private, safe, and quiet space will be needed. 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 sometimes we may need to share information; whenever possible, we will involve you in that decision. Reasons 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 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 that 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. 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 have issues accessing your session, you can call the office line **on 01604 634385** or text 07957 515677 and our staff will get a message to your counsellor immediately
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 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 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.

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- **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 Lowdown. 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 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.
- 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 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.