

- Hergert & Associates Family Counseling Services -

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INFORMED CONSENT ON USING EMAIL IN TREATMENT

This form is necessary because either you have previously indicated that you would like to use email within the counseling process, or you have sent your therapist an email that included your own confidential information. As per the appropriate standards of care regarding this mode of communication, you need to be informed about the risks that exist with email, the safeguards available to ensure confidentiality, and how emails are used in the counseling process.

1. Every client is encouraged to use face-to-face communication as much as possible with her or her therapist. In addition, phone calls are a valuable back up to in-person communication and should be sought out before using email. The priority is placed on face-to-face and verbal communication in order to reduce the confusion that can arise out of a delay in answering an email, or the confusion that can come if one is not acknowledged as expected by the client.
2. At a minimum, every client is encouraged to use an email account that requires a personal login and password in order to access his or her email account. Clients should ensure that no one else can access that information. Also, clients should avoid forwarding emails because confidentiality is no longer possible once it is removed from personal accounts.
3. Similarly, clients need to be aware the email folders (such as the inbox and sent folder) need to be safeguarded, too. Clients are advised to set controls that delete items from these folders regularly. This step is a safeguard against the atypical event where an email account is “hacked” and used for spamming purposes. Any traditional email account that is not secure risks this small possibility. *(A clue as to whether or not you have secure email is looking at the URL of the webpage you are on and seeing if it has “https://” on the website address vs. “http://”/ The “s” stands for secure.)*
4. **The safest option for emailing your therapist is to obtain a free, secure email account via “Hushmail”. Please visit www.hushmail.com to set up your own account without charge.**
5. Please be advised that traditional email is not encrypted. As a result, these “clear text” messages (i.e. non-secure email messages) may be intercepted in extremely unique situations and viewed by an outside party. *Clients accept this risk by not using the previous option #3 described above.*
6. **If you do not obtain an account via Hushmail, please be aware that you will be**

asked to create a Security Question Answer - "SQA" - (use the spot below to record it). An SQA ensures that any encrypted emails from your therapist can be viewed using your standard email account. Without this SQA, you will not be able to answer the security question that exists prior to reading any email response.

7. Once you have used the SQA the first time, Hushmail allows you to choose to create a "passphrase". This step enables you to communicate securely while using your standard email account without having to enter the SQA every time. (You can visit www.hushmail.com for more information.)
8. Please be aware that counselors may choose to keep all or some records of any treatment related email communication with you in your file (i.e. printed copies of emails received and/or sent). If you have any questions about this, please talk with your therapist about how that is decided.
9. Your counselor will continue to pursue the appropriate standards of care regarding electronic communications. This effort includes updating this informed consent when necessary, obtaining specialty certifications, and adding cost-effective safeguards when available and appropriate.
10. If email is not a viable option for communicating with your therapist temporarily (or permanently), you will be informed directly. This will occur either in a session, or via an automated email response. The automated response will inform you of when email will be answered again, when the therapist will return, or it will identify another resource to use get help in place of your therapist while he or she is unavailable.

My Security Question Answer (SQA) is: _____

Client Signature (14 years or older)

Date

Client Guardian or Parent Signature

Date

Witness

Date