

## **TAMUCC University Counseling Center Information about Distance Counseling Services for Students**

### **Scope of Service and Eligibility**

TAMUCC University Counseling Center offers distance counseling via telephone or video conferencing to currently enrolled TAMUCC students who meet the eligibility criteria for distance counseling services. If it is determined by the clinical staff that your needs exceed the scope of service or expertise available at TAMUCC University Counseling Center or that your needs cannot be adequately met by participating in distance counseling, we will assist you to identify an appropriate referral to meet your needs.

### **Limitations of Distance counseling**

Distance counseling should not be viewed as a substitute for face-to-face counseling or medication prescribed by a physician. It is an alternative form of counseling with some differences from traditional counseling. For example:

- Due to the use of technology, video counseling may have disruptions in service and quality of service.
- Video communication may lack some visual or audio cues that on occasion may result in misunderstanding. Should this ever happen, it is important to assume that your counselor has positive regard for you, and to check out your assumptions with your counselor. This will reduce any unnecessary feelings of discomfort.
- If you are having a severe crisis, acute psychosis, or suicidal or homicidal thoughts, video counseling is not an appropriate treatment modality and you will be referred to a higher level of care.

### **Emergency Management for Distance Counseling**

So that TAMUCC University Counseling Center is able to get you help in the case of an emergency and for your safety, the following measures are important and necessary:

- Your counselor will need to know the location/address in which you will consistently be during counseling sessions and will need to know if this location changes.
- Your counselor will request that you identify someone, whom you trust, to give your counselor permission to contact should a situation occur that your counselor believes you to be at risk. You, and/or your counselor, will verify that this emergency contact person is able and willing to go to your location in the event of an emergency, and if your counselor deems necessary, call 911 and/or transport you to a hospital.

### **Backup Plan in Case of Technology Failure**

- The most reliable backup is a phone. Therefore, it is recommended that you always have a phone available, and that you provide your counselor with your phone number.
- If you get disconnected from a video conferencing session, please stay logged into TAO. Your counselor will re-start the session and if this is not possible, will call you by phone.

## **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is essential to your counseling progress. Our clinicians are licensed professional counselors, licensed professional counselor interns, licensed psychologists, and master's level practicum counselors/interns who are ethically and legally bound to maintain your confidentiality. A written and/or electronic record of your contacts with the UCC will be maintained in a secure manner. All distance counseling correspondence will be done through the Patient Portal, which is encrypted to the federal standard.

## **Protecting Your Own Privacy**

TAMUCC University Counseling Center recommends that you (the client) are aware of and use safety measures for keeping your PHI (Personal Health Information) confidential. When participating in distance counseling it is recommended that you:

- Conduct the sessions in a private location where others cannot hear you.
- Do not record any sessions.
- Password protect your computer, tablet, phone, and any other device with a password that is unique.
- Always log out of your sessions.
- Do not have any software remember your password. Sign in every time.
- Do not share your passwords with anyone.
- Do not share your computer when you are logged on to any counseling software.
- If you wish to avoid others knowing that you are receiving counseling services, clear your browser's cache (browsing history), and on your phone, list your therapist by a name rather than as "counselor or therapist".
- Have all of your devices set to time out requiring you to sign back in after a set idle time.
- Keep your computer updated.
- Use a firewall and antivirus program.
- When online do not login as an administrator.
- Router / Access Point
  - Only use a secure network for internet access using a WAP2 security key.
  - Use your own administrator ID and password (not the default) for your router or access point.
  - Choose a custom SSID name, not the default name.
  - Limit the range of your Wi-Fi by positioning it near the center of your home.
- Notify your counselor if you suspect any breach in your security.

## **Videoconference or Phone Sessions**

It is recommended that 10 minutes prior to your appointment, you log onto the patient portal at <https://tamuccportal.pointnck.com> to complete the symptom checklist. For videoconference sessions, sign into your TAO account at <https://thepath.taocconnect.org> at least 5 minutes prior to your session start time and wait for your counselor to begin the session. For phone sessions, your counselor will phone you at the scheduled time. If you need to cancel your appointment, please do so at least 24 hours in advance through the Patient Portal or by calling (361)825-2703.