



## Privacy in Therapy

### What to expect

The purpose of meeting with a counselor or therapist is to get help with problems in your life that are bothering you or that are keeping you from being successful in important areas of your life. You may be here because you wanted to talk to a counselor or therapist about these problems. Or, you may be here because your parent, guardian, doctor or teacher had concerns about you. When we meet, we will discuss these problems. I will ask questions, listen to you and suggest a plan for improving these problems. It is important that you feel comfortable talking to me about the issues that are bothering you. Sometimes these issues will include things you don't want your parents or guardians to know about. For most people, knowing that what they say will be kept private helps them feel more comfortable and have more trust in their counselor or therapist. Privacy, also called confidentiality, is an important and necessary part of good counseling.

As a general rule, I will keep the information you share with me in our sessions confidential, unless I have your written consent to disclose certain information. There are, however, important exceptions to this rule that are important for you to understand before you share personal information with me in a therapy session. In some situations, I am required by law or by the guidelines of my profession to disclose information whether or not I have your permission. I have listed some of these situations below.

### When Privacy Cannot be Maintained

There are some situations where I am permitted or required to disclose information without either your consent or authorization. There are four limits to confidentiality: the intention to hurt yourself, the intention to hurt someone else, reports of child abuse, and reports of elder or dependent adult abuse. Suspicion of child, elder, or dependent adult abuse may also need to be reported. If you mention any of these situations during one of your sessions, I am required by law to break confidentiality and contact the proper authorities. If you threaten to harm yourself, I may be obligated to seek hospitalization, or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection. If you communicate a serious threat of physical violence against an identifiable victim, I must take protective actions, including notifying the potential victim and contacting the police. I may also seek hospitalization, or contact others who can assist in protecting the victim.

If you are involved in a court case and a request is made for information about your counseling or therapy, I will not disclose information without your written agreement *unless* the court requires me to. I will do all I can within the law to protect your confidentiality, and if I am required to disclose information to the court, I will inform you that this is happening.

### Communicating with your parent(s) or guardian(s)

Except for situations such as those mentioned above, I will not tell your parent or guardian specific things you share with me in our private therapy sessions. This includes activities and behavior that your parent/guardian would not approve of -- or would be upset by -- but that do not put you at risk of serious and immediate harm.

However, if your risk-taking behavior becomes more serious, then I will need to use my professional judgment to decide whether you are in serious and immediate danger of being harmed. If I feel that you are in such danger, I will communicate this information to your parent or guardian.

**Example:** If you tell me that you have tried alcohol at a few parties, I would keep this information confidential. If you tell me that you are drinking and driving or that you are a passenger in a car with a driver who is drunk, I would not keep this information confidential from your parent/guardian. If you tell me, or if I believe based on things you've told me, that you are addicted to alcohol, I would not keep this information confidential.

You can always ask me questions about the types of information I would disclose. You can ask in the form of "hypothetical situations," in other words: "If someone told you that they were doing \_\_\_\_\_, would you tell their parents?"

Even if I have agreed to keep information confidential - to not tell your parent or guardian - I may believe that it is important for them to know what is going on in your life. In these situations, I will encourage you to tell your parent/guardian and will help you find the best way to tell them. Also, when meeting with your parents, I may sometimes describe problems in general terms, without using specifics, in order to help them know how to be more helpful to you.

You should also know that, by law in California, your parent/guardian has the right to see any written records I keep about our sessions. It is extremely rare that a parent/guardian would ever request to look at these records.

**Communicating with other adults**

**School:** I will not share any information with your school unless I have your permission and permission from your parent or guardian. Sometimes I may request to speak to someone at your school to find out how things are going for you. Also, it may be helpful in some situations for me to give suggestions to your teacher or counselor at school. If I want to contact your school, or if someone at your school wants to contact me, I will discuss it with you and ask for your written permission. A very unlikely situation might come up in which I do not have your permission but both I and your parent or guardian believe that it is very important for me to be able to share certain information with someone at your school. In this situation, I will use my professional judgment to decide whether to share any information.

**Doctors:** Sometimes your doctor and I may need to work together; for example, if you need to take medication in addition to seeing a therapist. I will get your written permission and permission from your parent/guardian in advance to share information with your doctor. The only time I will share information with your doctor even if I don't have your permission is if you are doing something that puts you at risk for serious and immediate physical/medical harm.

Now that you've taken the time to read this information, I would like to end by welcoming you to my practice. I look forward to working with you.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Minors Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Parents Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Amber Learn, Psy.D. PSY 25444

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date