



## AGREEMENT TO TREATMENT: TELETHERAPY

### About the Service

Teletherapy, or the provision of psychotherapeutic and adjunct services via telecommunications technologies, is a novel and inventive method of connecting psychotherapy practitioners with persons seeking mental health support. UPWARD Counselling and Psychological Services is dedicated to promoting the psychological wellbeing of its clients, and aims to do so via the most cost-effective, streamlined and convenient means possible. With these goals in mind, UPWARD is now offering clients the option of having teletherapy sessions with our Clinical Psychotherapist, Ms. Reycine Mc Kenzie, using an online videoconferencing platform called **Doxy.me**.

Doxy.me is a HIPAA-compliant teletherapy platform – i.e. it ensures the highest level safeguards for clients' private mental health information under the United States' Health Information Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). This means that, while using Doxy.me, all information shared between you and the therapist is encrypted and protected to ensure confidentiality and prevent loss and leakage. For clients to connect with the therapist via Doxy.me, the therapist will provide you with a link, via an electronic method of your choosing (e.g. text message, email), which you can then click to enter into a virtual waiting room where the therapist will meet you. To take part in a videoconferencing session with the therapist, the client must have access to a device with a camera, microphone, and internet browser (e.g. Chrome, Safari, Firefox); and stable and reliable internet connection.

Similar to doing in-person sessions, teletherapy sessions are conducted using a variety of approaches and interventions. Depending on the issues presented, session tools can include talk therapy, verbal role plays, in- and out-of-session assignments, and psychosocial assessments. Psychotherapy approaches, i.e. the lenses through which the presenting issues are framed and treated, may be cognitive-behavioural, systems-family, psychodynamic, psycho-educational, or developmental. (A cursory google search will provide you with more information on each of these psychotherapy approaches.)

### Session Format / What to Expect

As some problems require only a brief intervention it may be determined during your first contact with the therapist that a one-off teletherapy session is sufficient. One-off sessions will include a conversation about the presenting problem, the kind of support that will be most beneficial, and a brief psychotherapeutic intervention with potential referrals to other service providers or specialists, workshops, or other self-help resources. A one-off teletherapy session lasts for 1.5 hours.

If you and/or the therapist decide that more than a one-off session is required and you would like to continue working together, the therapist will indicate how many sessions she recommends based on the diagnosis and severity of the presenting problem, and whether intervention from another specialist (e.g. psychiatrist) is required in addition to teletherapy. Usually, the minimum number of sessions suggested at UPWARD is 6 to 8. The reasoning behind this is that the psychotherapeutic relationship is one built on trust, respect, and openness and these take time to establish. In order for a psychotherapeutic intervention to be successful and bring about significant, long-lasting change, the client and therapist need time to build those virtues, get to the roots of the problem and work through them. In spite of the suggested number of sessions, session lengths are 50 minutes. Frequency of sessions will also be determined based on the severity and immediacy of the presenting problem(s).

Over the course of the first 2 sessions, the therapist will gain a deeper understanding of the problem via a semi-structured clinical interview, assessments and talk therapy. She will then diagnose the problem and come up with a treatment plan with objectives and potential outcomes which she will discuss with and get feedback from you. Given the collaborative nature of clinical counselling, you and the therapist will both decide which course of treatment and/or treatment activities will be most helpful to bring about the desired changes. Throughout

treatment, you will be asked to complete brief psychosocial assessments that will help the therapist get a better idea of your symptoms, current level of functioning, and mental status.

## **Benefits and Risks of Teletherapy**

Teletherapy, when done well, offers a lot of the same benefits as in-person therapy. For example, it will allow you to explore your feelings, behaviours, and thoughts, restore interpersonal relationships, come up with solutions to difficult issues, enhance awareness and insight, and bring about other positive life changes. Unique to teletherapy, however, is the ability for you to connect with the therapist without having to be in the same physical space. You can thus save time and money on transportation, connect with the therapist from a convenient location of your choosing, and ensure continuity of care despite obstacles with meeting face-to-face (e.g. migration). Despite its amazing benefits, teletherapy is different to in-person therapy and has inherent risks and considerations. These factors are outlined below.

### **1. Confidentiality**

Due to the personal nature of the information you disclose during teletherapy sessions, UPWARD values your privacy and makes every effort to keep your information confidential. Everything said between you and the therapist is kept within the confines of the teletherapy space. However, there are certain risks associated with teletherapy, and therapy generally, in which UPWARD cannot guarantee confidentiality. These are:

1. **Privacy Limits:** Because teletherapy sessions will not take place at UPWARD's office space but, instead, remotely via telecommunications technologies, the potential exists for others to overhear what is being shared during your sessions. As such, the therapist will take the necessary precautions to ensure privacy, including using headphones and a private area out of earshot of others. UPWARD asks that you take the same precautions and encourage you to participate in teletherapy sessions only while in a room outside of earshot of others. If this is unavoidable, we ask you to consider whether teletherapy (over in-person therapy) is the best option for you and the implications of others overhearing what you share.
2. **Risk of Hackers:** UPWARD is legally obligated to protect clients' mental health information. Therefore, UPWARD keeps de-identified softcopies of client personal records, psychotherapy notes and reports in a secure storage. Hardcopies of client files are kept in a locked file cabinet and client files are kept for seven years post-termination of treatment after which they will be securely disposed. These security measures ensure an extra layer of protection against unauthorized persons gaining access to client information. However, in using online platforms like Doxy.me, there is the risk of unauthorized access by hackers. The same can be said for client information stored in encrypted databases and softcopy files shared via other electronic media such as e-mail and text message. UPWARD cannot guarantee confidentiality with e-mail and text messages, so the therapist will not discuss any clinical information with you via these methods and we prefer you do not either. While UPWARD will take precautions to protect clients' information on our end (by using the most updated encryption methods, for example), we ask that you take the necessary steps to secure your communications, such as password protecting the device you use for teletherapy sessions and using only secure networks
3. **Limits of Confidentiality:** What clients share during teletherapy sessions is kept confidential due to the personal nature of these disclosures. However, there are some instances in which client information may be disclosed to a third party, whether by your request or because the therapist is legally and/or ethically bound to disclose this information. These exceptional situations include:
  - o *Risk of harm to self.* This encompasses situations in which the client has expressly indicated that he/she is engaging or has intent to engage in life-threatening, self-injurious behaviours such as serious cutting, burning, and other self-harm or suicidal gestures. In this situation, the therapist has the right to use her clinical judgement to contact the appropriate caregiver, next of kin, identified emergency contact, and/or psychiatric or emergency service in order to ensure the client's safety.
  - o *Grave disability.* It may become apparent to therapist that the client is experiencing severe psychosis (e.g. hallucinations, delusions), is highly intoxicated (by some drug or substance) or delirious, or has some other grave condition that prevents him/her from taking care of his/her basic needs. In this case, the therapist will contact the appropriate caregiver, next of kin, identified emergency contact, and/or psychiatric or emergency service in order to ensure the client's safety.

- *Risk of harm to others.* During the course of psychotherapy the client may express the desire and/or intention to physically harm a named individual OR the therapist may have reasonable grounds to believe, based on what the client has shared, that he/she plans to seriously harm a certain person. In either of these situations, the therapist reserves the right to notify the police and the named individual (if that information is available) to ensure that person's safety.
- *Request to release information.* If your information must be shared with a third party as per your request, legal mandates, or stated policies at UPWARD, you will be given a Release-of-Information (ROI) form in which you will detail the information that UPWARD is allowed to share. A link to this form can be found [here](#). At UPWARD, clients are also asked to complete ROI forms for other service providers whom may be treating you for related problems (for e.g. a psychiatrist or general practitioner) and for loved ones with whom you may want UPWARD to coordinate your care. Such releases are necessary to make sure that UPWARD is providing you with comprehensive, top quality and well-coordinated care.
- *Abuse of vulnerable persons.* If during the course of treatment the client names a child or vulnerable adult that is being abused or neglected, the therapist is ethically obligated to notify the relevant authorities in order to protect that child or vulnerable. For child abuse, a report will be made to the Children's Authority of Trinidad and Tobago after sufficient information is gathered from the client, such as the names of the child(ren) and parent(s) involved. For elder abuse, a report will be made to the Division of Aging.
- *Research.* Client data may be used to compile statistics (anonymously) to monitor trends in the work at UPWARD. If client data is used for research purposes you will receive confidentiality protections under the laws of T&T.
- *Legal mandates.* You may become involved in legal proceedings such as a custody case or lawsuit and believe that your therapist at UPWARD can provide expert witness on your case, whether via written report or oral testimony. However, due to the confidential and sensitive nature of the information clients disclose in the therapy setting, UPWARD reserves the right to refuse your or your attorney's request to appear in court or disclose information in your client record unless a judge or court issues an order. If a court order is issued, UPWARD is legally bound to abide by the directives of the court order and will have you sign a Release of Information form agreeing to the information to be shared with the court. If UPWARD is unable to reach you to sign the Release or you choose not to sign it of your own volition, UPWARD will still be required to appear in court/submit the information requested. Only the minimum necessary information will be provided to the court.
- *Supervision and consulting.* In order to provide the best possible care, the therapist may consult with other clinicians and/or professionals in the field. These consultations are for professional purposes and clients' identifying information will be kept confidential.

## 2. Distress Management

Given that therapy often involves the processing and discharge of distressing emotions within the therapy space, you may sometimes feel overwhelmed by unpleasant emotions during sessions. When therapy is happening in-person, the physical presence of the therapist coupled with the employment of grounding techniques can often help to manage the intensity of these emotions and bring you back to baseline by the session end. However, the physical distance between you and the therapist during a teletherapy session can possibly make it more difficult for you to manage your distress in the moment. As such, it is important for you and the therapist to discuss upfront a distress management plan for how you will manage your emotional distress in the physical absence of the therapist, during and in-between sessions.

## 3. Crisis/Emergency Management

Situations may arise in which there is a threat to your physical safety, either because of immediate risk of self-harm or a threat to your life by someone else (e.g. domestic abuse). Therefore, it is necessary for you and the therapist, when discussing issues surrounding safety and risk at the onset of therapy, to develop a safety plan that highlights how crisis/emergency situations such as these will be handled.

## 4. Transition from Teletherapy to In-Person Therapy

Over the course of teletherapy sessions, the therapist may come to the informed decision, based on their best clinical judgement, that you are no longer being appropriately served by teletherapy and would be better served by in-person sessions. Some factors that may impact

the therapist's decision to transition to in-person sessions include the nature of your diagnosis, ability to manage distress during sessions, level of risk to self or others, cognitive and physical abilities, savviness using telecommunications technologies, privacy risk, or request to transition to in-person sessions. If this happens, you and the therapist will develop a transition plan which would ensure a smooth transition from tele- to in-person therapy.

## 5. Integrity of Telecommunications Technology

UPWARD unfortunately cannot guarantee that there will not be technological failures with the Doxy.me platform, internet connection, online payments, or the videoconferencing software. As such, the therapist will walk through a plan with you as to how you, the therapist, and UPWARD will deal with technological failures.

## 6. Miscommunications

Though we do not foresee communication via videoconferencing being a major obstacle, there may be times where, due to the remote nature of teletherapy, verbal or non-verbal communications may be misunderstood by either you or the therapist. If this happens, the therapist will do her best to address these issues as they come up. UPWARD requests that you do the same, being straightforward with the therapist about any miscommunications you become aware of during session.

## Boundaries

It is important for the therapist and client to have mutual respect, trust, and confidence in each other. In order to foster these virtues and minimize misunderstandings in the psychotherapy relationship, UPWARD would like you to be aware of the following potentially awkward situations:

1. *Meeting in a social setting.* Aligned with respecting your right to privacy, if the therapist sees you in a social setting she will not initiate contact. However, if you do approach her she will follow your lead on the conversation.
2. *Social media.* In an attempt to respect the boundaries of what you share about yourself in the psychotherapy room, the therapist will not use any social media, search engines, or any other means to find out further information about your personal background. UPWARD requests that you give mutual regard to the therapist in this manner.
3. *Complaints.* In the case that you are dissatisfied with the services at UPWARD you are encouraged to address these concerns with the therapist directly in order to resolve these issues. If after speaking with the therapist you are still dissatisfied with your service and would like to make a formal complaint, you can send an e-mail to the Trinidad and Tobago Association of Psychologists at [secretary@psychologytt.org](mailto:secretary@psychologytt.org). Nonetheless, you have the right to withdraw from treatment at any time, refuse a particular type of treatment, request other treatment options, or ask to redirect treatment. You may also request to view your psychotherapy records at any time but the therapist will need to have a clinical conversation with you to determine the pros and cons of such an inquiry.
4. *Multiple roles.* Trinidad and Tobago has a relatively small population so it is likely that the therapist and client will have an additional connection outside of the psychotherapy relationship, whether directly or via a third party. As such, you and the therapist will have a conversation at the outset as to how you plan to maintain strict boundaries in this area and isolate the psychotherapy relationship from the influence of outside connections.

## Fees, Attendance, and Cancellations

To get the most out of your psychotherapy sessions it is crucial for you to make every effort to attend regularly and be on time. If you are unable to attend due to an emergency or other unforeseeable circumstance, kindly contact the psychotherapist as soon as possible. For cancellations made less than 24 hours in advance, you will be required to pay half of the session fee unless you and the psychotherapist come to an understanding that the situation was outside of your control. If you miss a session without contacting the psychotherapist, you will receive a call within 3 business days to reschedule your appointment. You will still be expected to pay half of the missed session fee. If the psychotherapist is unable to get into contact with you within two weeks she will assume that you do not wish to continue and will close your case. In the event that the psychotherapist needs to cancel your session, you will be given as much notice as possible and other session arrangements will be made accordingly.

The breakdown of session fees are as follows (**NB:** corporate prices will vary):

- Initial Session/One-off Consultation: \$350 (online; 1 hour and 15 mins); \$450 (in-person; 1 hour)
- Individual Psychotherapy: \$300 (50 mins - online); \$450 (50 mins – in-person)
- Group Psychotherapy: cost will vary depending on number of participants. Starting cost is \$200/person
- Family or Couples Counselling: \$450 (online); \$750 (in-person)
- Formal Psychological Assessments: price variable – depends on the type of test to be administered. If an assessment is required the psychotherapist will let you know beforehand so this cost is catered for in advance.

UPWARD is currently unable to offer services on a sliding scale basis but does take health insurance. Payment methods at UPWARD include cash, online transfer, bank deposit, and cheque.

## Working with Dependants

When working with a child, adolescent, or dependent adult client it is his/her primary adult caregiver that is the consenting client. The consenting client is the primary adult caregiver that is consenting to services at UPWARD on the client's behalf. As such, the consenting client is entitled to have open and clear communication about the dependant's treatment, including, but not limited to: the psychotherapist's impressions of the presenting problem(s), what is generally discussed in session, and documentation of treatment progress. While the aforementioned is true, there needs to be a level of trust and privacy established between the psychotherapist and the dependant client so he/she can open up and explore his/her issues. Such confidence cannot be established unless the dependant has the assurance that the caregiver(s) will not know every detail of what is discussed in the psychotherapy sessions. This is particularly true for adolescents who are undergoing a transition from greater reliance on and closeness with parents to more independence and autonomy. Adolescents are also undergoing a time of exploration and discovery, a lot of which is within the boundaries of normal adolescent experience but in some instances may require caregiver intervention. Therefore, it is crucial for the primary caregiver(s) and psychotherapist to discuss early on what their expectations and standards are for acceptable behaviour. What UPWARD will provide is general information about how treatment is going, areas of concern and imminent risk, and other issues that may be impacting the dependant's ability to function optimally that are within the caregiver(s)' sphere of influence/control. UPWARD will also let you know whether other specialized services are necessary and present you with a treatment summary at termination of treatment (if requested). Everything else that UPWARD shares with the caregiver(s) regarding the dependant's treatment will be with the dependant's explicit consent and in his/her best interest.

There may disagreement between the caregiver(s) and psychotherapist regarding the dependant's treatment. In such instances, the psychotherapist will be open to listening to the caregiver(s)'s concerns and sharing her stance on the helpfulness and effectiveness of the suggested interventions. If an agreement cannot be reached, the caregiver is free to do what he/she believes is in the dependant's best interest, including terminating treatment at UPWARD. UPWARD asks that if you wish to prematurely end treatment that you allow the psychotherapist to have a final session with the dependant in order to gain closure on both sides.

The psychotherapist may request to have a collateral session with the caregiver(s) only in order to discuss specifics of the dependant's treatment, offer advice or foster parenting/caretaking skills that can increase the dependant's psychological wellness. UPWARD will notify the caregiver(s) if such a session is needed. In addition, UPWARD requests that, in the case that there are legal proceedings involving the relationship between caregivers and/or a child custody case, neither caregiver will try to gain the upper hand over the other by asking the psychotherapist to testify on his/her behalf or present treatment documentation based on the psychotherapist's involvement with the dependant.

## Contact

Operating hours at UPWARD are from 8am to 5pm Monday to Friday, except public holidays. Principal Clinical Therapist, Reycine Mc Kenzie, can be reached at 1 (868) 287-7956. In the case that she is not immediately reachable, please leave a voicemail and your call will be returned as soon as possible. In the event of a critical emergency, immediate crisis, or life-threatening situation, please contact one of the following emergency numbers:

- Police: 999

- Ambulance: 811
- Suicide Hotline: 800-5588 (toll free)
- St. Ann's Psychiatric Hospital: 624-1151 (ext. 5)
- Mental Health Unit, Eric Williams Medical Sciences Complex: 624-3232 (ext. 2542)
- San Fernando General Hospital, Ward One: 652-3581 (ext. 3221)6

## Consent

I, the undersigned, hereby confirm that I have read the above Agreement to Treatment thoroughly, acknowledge and understand the policies herein, and agree to comply with them. I also agree to pay the professional fees according to services rendered at the time of each appointment.

X

\_\_\_\_\_  
Client Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

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REYCINE MC KENZIE, M.Sc.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Founder and Clinical Psychotherapist

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date