

Policies and Procedures

Effective February 7, 2024

Appointment Policy

A standard session is 45 minutes, although I am happy to arrange shorter or longer sessions with clients if asked and as appropriate. Sessions start on the hour and end at fifteen minutes prior to the following hour for a 45-minute session. I work very hard to make sure I respect your time and start sessions on time. Sometimes, however, a client is in crisis or some other event may cause me to delay the start of your session. If this happens, you will get your full 45 minutes of time. If you arrive late to your session, your session will still end at its scheduled time. I will wait for 15 minutes on the telehealth platform before I leave. If you are an insurance client, please note that I only get paid for the time we spend together. If you come late to the session or leave early and I am unable to bill for the 45-minutes that was reserved for you, you will be expected to pay the difference between what the insurance pays for the shortened period and your insurance's rate for a 45-minute session.

Please note that sometimes clients will bring up something significant at the end of the session. If this happens in session, I will not be able to extend the session and will tell you that we will have to discuss it at our next appointment.

Because your appointment time is reserved for you, I require a full 24 hours of notice (not including weekends) if you need to cancel or reschedule. If you cancel within 24 hours to your appointment, I will charge you for the appointment (after the first time) at your full contracted rate. The first late cancellation/reschedule or missed appointment is a "freebie" because life happens but thereafter, you will be charged for your appointment. Emergencies do sometimes happen and, when appropriate, the fee may be waived at my discretion. Three missed appointments in a 90-day period will result in me ending the counseling relationship and giving you referrals to some other providers. Frequent cancellations and rescheduling of appointments will prompt an exploration of whether this is the right life circumstance for therapy. If I have to cancel or reschedule you within 24 hours of the appointment, I will waive your next late cancellation/reschedule or missed appointment fee after the first time. (Please note: It is exceptionally rare for me to need to reschedule someone close to an appointment and to date I have never had to waive a fee due to my own cancellations, but I am trying to be transparent about all policies).

As your therapist, I have legal and ethical obligations which require that I see you regularly. Unless we have made arrangements in advance, I will terminate the counseling relationship with you if it has been more than 3 weeks since I have met with you. If this happens and you wish to resume counseling, the counseling relationship can be re-established if there is availability in my schedule.

Appointment Reminders

At the time you fill out your intake paperwork in the client portal, you will have the option of requesting an automated appointment reminder. Please know that you are still responsible for making it to your appointment regardless of whether or not you receive such reminders.

Telehealth Appointments

I am Board Certified in telemental health (video counseling) and I meet with clients exclusively through telehealth. Not every person's needs are appropriate for video counseling; if I determine at some point that video counseling is not appropriate for you, I will discuss this with you and provide referrals for in-person counseling.

The primary telehealth platform for our appointments is Doxy.me. The link for this will always be <https://doxy.me/vitaliscounseling>

In case of technical issues or other problems, the backup site for telehealth sessions is Sessions. The link for this will always be <https://sessions.psychologytoday.com/apolk>

Occasionally, the video connection is slow or there is some technical problem. In these cases, it is usually resolved by having both parties close the tab, open a new tab, and going to Doxy.me again. I have found that clearing the computer's internal memory by rebooting prior to going to Doxy.me is the best way to avoid issues and sometimes this may be needed if re-opening Doxy in a new tab doesn't solve the problem. I recommend rebooting the computer prior to the session for optimal results. If we lose our connection or are unable to see or hear each other during the session the procedure is this: first, try closing the tab and opening a new tab and logging back into to Doxy. (Or, better still, reboot your system and then log in). If this does not work, then you should call me at 816-226-4678. We will either finish the session by phone or move to the backup platform.

NOTE: We cannot have a session if you are driving or if you are in a public space.

If you come to a session while driving or while out in public, I will cancel the session and reschedule for another time. You will be responsible for the cost of that session that was rescheduled.

With video sessions, I will guarantee your confidentiality on my end but I cannot guarantee your privacy on your end. It is your responsibility to make sure you are alone in a room and have privacy. You may wish to use a headset so that you are the only person who hears me speaking. On my end, I wear a headset and take additional measures to maintain your privacy. If you would like me to show you my office at the start of the session (to verify that I am alone), please ask.

Communication Outside of Sessions

It is important for you to be aware that I am not on call 24/7. If you are experiencing an emergency, you need to call 911, call a crisis hotline such as 988, or go to your nearest emergency room rather than wait to make contact with me. I generally check my messages once a day outside the office.

I am often not immediately available by telephone. When I am unavailable, you can leave messages on my voicemail, which is confidential. Please allow two business days for a response to non-urgent matters. Phone conversations lasting more than 10 minutes (per event or in sum in a week) will be billed at the pro-rated rate. Phone conversations are documented in your file.

Texting

Research has shown that both email and texts have the potential for misunderstandings compared to talking in real-time. Because of this and concerns for your confidentiality, I ask that texting be done for scheduling matters only. I will not check texts outside of office hours.

Email

I have the ability to send encrypted emails to you and your responses to those emails are also encrypted. In order for you to send me an encrypted message, I must first email you. I am happy to do so if you email me and request an encrypted or private email. Any email I send you that is encrypted will have the subject "Encrypt" as this is the trigger for the system to encrypt my message to you. If you communicate with me using regular, unencrypted email I cannot guarantee the confidentiality of your email during its journey from you to me as it passes through third party servers and by sending such email you are acknowledging you understand and accept that risk. It is recommended that you never include anything you would be uncomfortable seeing on the front page of your local newspaper. Please note that emails do become part of your file. As stated above, research has shown that misunderstandings are a risk of email communication. For this reason, I want to address issues during our sessions and not through email.

Confidential messaging

You may send me messages confidentially through your client portal.

Financial Policies: Fees, Payments, and Insurance

Session fees are due at the time of service unless some prior agreement has been reached. The rate for each 45-minute appointment is \$125.00. 60-minute sessions and intake sessions are \$165.00. Between-session 30-minute check-in calls are available for \$75.00; please note that these may not be covered by insurance. Phone calls (singly or in total in a week) lasting 10 minutes or longer will be billed at a pro-rated amount. If you request for me to fill out paperwork or write a letter, you will be charged based on the time required to complete the task. If you request an emergency or crisis session, the usual rate will apply. It is my policy to not schedule appointments if there is an outstanding balance for more than one session.

I accept payments by credit, debit, HSA, or FSA cards. I accept payments through Stripe, a HIPAA-compliant and encrypted payment system used by Amazon, Walmart, Apple, and Etsy among many other companies. Stripe uses bank-level encryption and stores your card information in an encrypted format which I do not have access to. I do require that a card is kept on file so that I may bill for missed appointments and late cancellations. The charge should show as "Vitalis Counseling, LLC."

If I am not a provider for your insurance, you need to be aware that I do NOT provide "Superbills," the specific medical receipt required by insurance companies for out-of-network claims.

If I am a provider for insurance you wish to utilize, it is important that you understand that insurance will only pay for issues that are diagnosable as a mental health disorder. This means that if your issue does not rise to the level of a clinical disorder, they will not pay for therapy. It also means that in order for them to pay for therapy, they require me to give you a diagnosis that will be a permanent part of your health record. By providing your insurance information, you are giving your consent for me to provide information the insurance company requires about you to process the claim. You are responsible for charges insurance does not cover.

Recording of sessions

You agree that you will not record the therapy sessions without first discussing it with me and getting my consent. I will not record your therapy sessions without discussing it with you and getting your consent first.

Safety Plans

It is my practice to work with you on the development of a safety plan within the first several sessions if you have a diagnosis that carries with it an elevated risk of suicidal thinking or if you indicate that you are having some thoughts of suicide. I believe it is good practice to have a plan developed and ready for you in case you ever need it rather than trying to develop one after you are already in crisis. If I do not determine that we should develop a safety plan together early on, I will work with you to create one if at any point later you indicate you are having thoughts of suicide. The safety plan is collaboratively created with you and your needs and situation in mind. It will be customized to ideas that you believe you will find helpful. It is intended to be a resource and a reminder of helpful and useful actions you can take to ideally prevent yourself from reaching a decision to attempt suicide. If you are not suicidal at this time but have been in the past and would like to

develop a safety plan together, please let me know and I will be happy to do this.

Miscellaneous Policies

Notes

I take notes during sessions. This is to ensure I am able to write accurate and thorough notes as required by law and insurance companies. I may also jot down something I want to remember to research at a later time or to remember to follow up on sending an article, reference, or other information I promised you in session. I am happy to tell you what I'm writing or even show you if you ask.

Social Media Policy

I do not accept friend requests or follow requests from current or past clients on any social media platform. I will also not respond to any direct messages sent to me on any social media platform. I do not knowingly follow any current or former clients on any social media platform. Please be aware that commenting to a post I have made can break your confidentiality. I cannot respond to any such posts due to my obligation to maintain your confidentiality on my end. It is likely I will not see a comment and if it is something you want to discuss, it is best to bring it up at our next session.

Substance Use Policy

Alcohol and other substances can lower inhibitions and influence one to say or do something that they would not otherwise say or do. In order to protect against this, I ask that you are free from the influence of alcohol, cannabis (marijuana), or other substances during our session. If you are clearly intoxicated or under the influence, I will reschedule the session for another time; you will be financially responsible for the session that was rescheduled.

Release of Information / Authorization of Disclosure

This form gives me your legal permission to disclose information about you to others. I frequently ask for this permission to share information with other members of your healthcare team (your primary care physician, psychiatrist, etc) for coordination of care. You might also fill out this form if you want information shared with someone, such as if you move to a different therapist and want them to have your records. You are never obligated to sign such a form. If you do sign such a form, you can revoke the permission at any time by doing so in writing.

Access to Your File

You have the legal right to have a copy of your file. I will ask for a written request and an appointment where we can meet to review the materials and I can address any comments or questions you may have. Please note that I have 30 days to fulfill such a request.

Storage of Your File

Your file is stored electronically, either in the Electronic Health Record software (the software behind your client portal) or on my computer. In both cases, the data is encrypted at bank-level as HIPAA requires and are behind multiple locks (such as passwords and physical locks). Your records will be kept for seven years past the last date of service; after that time, they are destroyed and unavailable.

Complaints

If you are unhappy with what is occurring in therapy, you are strongly encouraged to speak with me about your concerns so I can respond appropriately. I will take your concerns seriously, with care and respect. If you believe I have been unwilling to listen and respond, or that I have behaved unethically, you may make an official complaint to the Committee for Professional Counselors through the Missouri Division of Professional Registration in Jefferson City, MO at 573-751-0293 and my license

number is 2017023658 . To make an official complaint to the Behavioral Sciences Review Board in Kansas, call (785) 296-3240. My Kansas license is number LCPC03261. You can make your report without fear of any kind of retaliation.

Ending Therapy

Therapy ends naturally much of the time, after a client has reached their therapeutic goals or when a client and therapist agree that ending is appropriate. There are a few exceptions to this, in which the therapist may end the therapeutic relationship. These include:

- If the client physically harms or verbally, physically, or sexually harasses the therapist, therapist's colleagues, or therapist's family/friends.
- If specific treatment is needed which is outside the therapist's scope of practice, the therapist may need to refer you to another provider.
- If at any point the therapist or client feels the therapist is not a good fit for the client, then therapist and client will discuss and therapist will make appropriate referrals.
- If client does not schedule an appointment for 3 consecutive weeks without prior arrangements made with therapist, the professional relationship will be considered terminated.

We will review this information at the first session and you can ask any questions you may have at that time.
I HAVE READ, UNDERSTOOD AND AGREE TO THE ITEMS CONTAINED IN THIS DOCUMENT.

Signature

Date