use records from a previous counselor to provide continuing care, and collaboration with another agency or professional in your treatment. Sometimes, certain situations override your confidentiality. For example, if you are involved in a criminal case, the judge can order your file to be turned over to the court or if you make statements that a child or an elderly or disabled person has been abused or neglected, your counselor is required by law to report that information to the appropriate authorities.

If you make statements that indicate you intend to harm yourself or others, the mental health counselor or marriage and family therapist may report that information to medical or law enforcement.

If there are similar situations your counselor should discuss with you before or during your initial session. Apart from these rare circumstances, you can be assured that the only people who will have access to your records are those you have given written consent. Parents have the right to receive progress reports on their children's counseling. However, personal information shared by a child during an individual session will be kept confidential unless it involves imminent danger to the child or someone else. You have a right to a copy of your own counseling records. This right is guaranteed under the law. You may be charged a reasonable fee for a copy of your records. You may read the text of this rule through a link at the board's web site.

No Sexual Activity

Counseling, by its very nature, often deals with the most private aspects of your life. It is your counselor's responsibility to ensure an atmosphere of safety for you, free from any kind of exploitation. The board does not tolerate sexual misconduct. A licensed MHC or MFT is prohibited from engaging in sexual contact or sexual exploitation of a client.

Maintaining a Professional Relationship

Your relationship with your counselor should be strictly professional in nature. For example, a counselor/therapist is not allowed to invite you into a business venture, ask you for personal favors, or subcontract with you to do office work. These examples are called, "dual relationships" and are unethical. Even after your counseling has been completed, your counselor/therapist may not engage in any working or personal relationship with you without informing you that future counseling will no longer be a possibility.

More Information

Visit the board's website for more information about licensed counselors/therapists. From this site, you may view or print the state laws and board rules that govern the provision of MHC and MFT counseling services in Iowa.

A Final Word

Much of the success of your counseling experience depends on you. You are most likely to reap benefits from counseling if you are motivated, honest, and willing to work at self-improvement and self-awareness.

If you have a complaint or concern, speak first to your counselor. If you are not able to resolve the problem, you can file a complaint with the board. A form is available at the board's web site or by calling the board office. You may call or contact the board in writing at the address provided in this brochure.

This brochure is for general informational purposes and does not constitute a legal agreement between any person and the Iowa Board of Behavioral Science. All information provided is believed to be accurate reliable, and valid; however, the board assumes no responsibility for errors. This information is not copyrighted; you are welcome to copy and distribute this brochure.

Iowa Board of Behavioral Science Examiners

What to Expect from a Licensed

Mental Health Counselor or a Marital and Family Therapist

Iowa Department of Public Health
Bureau of Professional Licensure
Lucas State Office Building, 5th Floor
321 East 12th Street
Des Moines, IA 50319-0075

www.idph.state.ia.us/licensure

515/281-0254

Mental Health Counselors (MHC) and Marital and Family Therapists (MFT) are licensed by the Iowa Board of Behavioral Science (the board). Board members are appointed by the Governor to carry out the general oversight of MHCs and MFTs in Iowa. MHCs and MFTs provide counseling services in accordance with state law and the board's administrative rules. This includes the code of ethics that the board has recognized for each profession. This brochure is intended to inform you of the ethical conduct that you may expect from your professional counselor. The counseling process should focus on enhancing your personal growth and your ability to cope with life's problems. You should be treated with dignity in a professional manner. When you invest in the counseling process, you experience the satisfaction of working successfully at some of the most important issues in your life. The guidelines established by the Board are aimed at promoting a positive counseling experience.

Valid License

You may visit the board's web page or contact the board office to determine if a counselor has an active license that is in good standing and has not been disciplined. Moreover, the site will help you to navigate any concerns or complaints that you may have about a counselor.

Truthful Advertising

MHCs and MFTs are required to be truthful when advertising counseling services to the public. A counselor should provide accurate information regarding their professional training and credentials, as well as what may be accomplished during counseling.

Practicing within the Scope of the Counseling Profession

MHC's and MFT's have been trained to provide counseling services. They will assist you through a therapeutic relationship using a combination of mental health and human development principles and techniques, to achieve your mental, emotional, physical, spiritual, social, education, or career-related development and adjustment. A MHC/MFT may assess, evaluate, and treat mental, emotional, or behavioral disorders and distresses that interfere with mental health. The counselor/therapist may also implement and evaluate treatment plans using interventions that include counseling, assessment, consultation, and referral. You may have occasion to ask questions that require legal, medical, or other specialized knowledge. If so, you should seek advice from your attorney, physician, or ask your counselor for a referral to a specialist in your area of concern.

Information at Initial Session

At or before your first counseling session you and your counselor should discuss general information relating to your counseling relationship such as:

- Scheduling, fees for counseling, cancellation, and payment policies.
- Goals that will guide the counseling process and methods or techniques that will be used during counseling.
- Any restrictions under which the counselor/therapist may be practicing (for example, are they working under the supervision of another professional).
- Confidentiality aspects of counseling/therapy and the circumstances under which something you say would not remain confidential.

- Other persons that may be included in the counseling process (for example, a team approach in the counseling office).

Accurate Record Keeping and Billing

The licensed MHC/MFT is required to store all client records for a minimum of seven years after the client's discharge or death, or, in the case of a minor, for three years after the client reaches the age of majority under state law or seven years after the date of the client's discharge or death, whichever is longer. These records include dates of treatment, case notes, correspondence, progress reports, and billing information. Billing to you and/or your insurance company must be for services rendered according to your agreement with your counselor. You cannot be billed for appointments that never existed, although you may be billed for appointments that were not cancelled in accordance with your counselor's cancellation policy. If you are a parent or guardian of a minor who is in counseling, you are entitled to a written summary and explanation of charges.

Confidentiality

Everything you discuss with your counselor remains confidential, with only a few exceptions. You must give signed permission before the MHC/MFT can share information with anyone about any aspect of your counseling. If you do give permission, you will have an opportunity to specify who should receive information from your file, what information they are allowed to receive, the purpose for which they may use the information and the period of time during which you are granting the permission. Be sure to read carefully any "release of information" or "consent" form that you may be asked to sign. Be sure to ask any questions that you may have. The common situations requiring a release of information includes certain inquires from insurance companies, a new counselor wanting to