



## **Informed Consent for a Minor**

### **What to expect:**

Welcome to The Settlement Home for Children! We are really glad you are here. The purpose of meeting with a therapist is to get help with things in your life that are bothering you or that are keeping you from reaching your goals. You may be here because you want to talk about these issues or because your parents, caregivers or someone else who loves you has encouraged you to come. Your first few sessions will be focused on you getting to know your therapist and for your therapist to get to know you. You can ask questions, set goals and make a plan together. It is important that you feel comfortable talking to your therapist. Sometimes these talks 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 therapist. Privacy, also called confidentiality, is an important and necessary part of good counseling.

As a general rule, your therapist will keep the information you share in sessions confidential unless you 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 in a therapy session. In some situations, your therapist is required by law or by the guidelines of the counseling profession to disclose information with or without your permission. Some of these situations are listed below.

### **Confidentiality cannot be maintained when:**

- 1) You disclose a plan to cause serious harm or death to yourself and your therapist believes you have the intent and ability to carry out this threat in the very near future. Your therapist must take steps to inform a parent or caregiver of what you have disclosed and how serious this threat is believed to be. Your therapist must make sure that you are protected from harming yourself.
- 2) You disclose a plan to cause serious harm or death to someone else who can be identified and they believe you have the intent and ability to carry out this threat in the very near future. In this situation, your therapist must inform your parents or caregivers, and the person who you intend to harm.
- 3) You are doing things that could cause serious harm to you or someone else, even if you do not *intend* to harm yourself or another person. In these situations,

your therapist will need to use professional judgment to decide whether a parent or caregiver should be informed.

4) You disclose that you are being abused-physically, sexually or emotionally-or that you have been abused in the past. In this situation, your therapist is required by law to report the abuse to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.

5) You are involved in a court case and a request is made for information about your counseling or therapy. If this happens, your therapist will not disclose information without your written agreement *unless* the court requires this. Your therapist will do everything possible within the law to protect your confidentiality, and if required to disclose information to the court, your therapist will inform you that this is happening.

### **Communicating with your parent(s) or caregiver(s):**

Except for situations such as those mentioned above, your therapist will not tell your parent or caregiver specific things you share in private therapy sessions. This includes activities and behavior that your parents/caregivers 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 your therapist will need to use professional judgment to decide whether you are in serious and immediate danger of being harmed. If your therapist determines that you are in such danger, this will be communicated to your parents or caregivers.

**Example:** If you disclose that you have tried alcohol at a few parties, this information would be kept confidential. If you disclose that you are drinking and driving or that you are a passenger in a car with a driver who is drunk, this would not be kept confidential from your parents/caregivers. If you disclose, or if your therapist believes based on things you've disclosed, that you are addicted to alcohol, this information would not be kept confidential.

**Example:** If you disclose that you are having protected sex with a boyfriend or girlfriend, this information would be kept confidential. If you disclose that, on several occasions, you have engaged in unprotected sex with people you do not know or you have put yourself in unsafe situations, this information would not be kept confidential.

You can always ask questions about the types of information that could be disclosed. 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 your therapist has agreed to keep information confidential, it may be determined that it is important for your parents or caregivers to know what is going on in your life. In these situations, your therapist will encourage you to tell

your parents/caregivers and will help you find the best way to tell them. Also, when meeting with your parents, your therapist may sometimes describe problems in general terms, without using specifics, in order to help them know how to be more helpful to you.

**Communicating with other adults:**

**School:** Your therapist will not share any information with your school unless you give permission and your parents or caregivers give permission. Sometimes your therapist 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 your therapist to give suggestions to your teacher or counselor at school. If your therapist wants to contact your school, or if someone at your school wants to contact your therapist, your therapist will discuss it with you and ask for your written permission. A very unlikely situation might come up in which your therapist does not have your permission, but both your therapist and your parents or caregivers believe that it is very important to be able to share certain information with someone at your school. In this situation, your therapist will use professional judgment to decide whether to share any information.

**Doctors:** Sometimes your doctor, psychologist or psychiatrist and your therapist may need to work together; for example, if you need to take medication in addition to seeing a therapist. Your therapist will get your written permission and permission from your parents/caregivers in advance to share information with your doctor. The only time your therapist will share information with your doctor without your permission is if you are doing something that puts you at risk for serious and immediate physical/medical harm.

_____	_____
Minor's Signature	Date
_____	_____
Parent/Caregiver Signature	Date
_____	_____
Parent/Caregiver Signature	Date
_____	_____
Therapist Signature	Date