

PITTSBURGH PASTORAL INSTITUTE  
A SAMARITAN COUNSELING CENTER

6324 Marchand Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15206  
412-661-1239 FAX: 412-661-1304  
Toll free: 877-661-9623 (ppi-online.org)

## **CLIENT RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

The following information is important to note as you begin your counseling relationship with the Pittsburgh Pastoral Institute (PPI). If you have additional questions or concerns, do not hesitate to discuss them with your counselor or call the Institute at one of the above numbers.

### **Services and Staff**

PPI is an interfaith counseling agency that integrates into the counseling process resources from the behavioral sciences and a client's religious faith. PPI counselors respect and appreciate the value of religion and spirituality in a person's life. Various counseling modalities are available. These include individual, couple, family, and group therapy.

All PPI counselors hold graduate-level degrees, licenses, or certifications in one or more of the mental health disciplines, including: Pastoral Counseling, Social Work, Marriage and Family Therapy, Clinical Psychology, and Professional Counseling. All PPI counselors adhere to the Standards and Code of Ethics of the American Association of Pastoral Counselors.

### **Treatment Approach**

While every counseling relationship is unique, your counselor is dedicated to providing a safe, secure, and empathic relationship in which to explore, understand, and, as far as possible, help resolve your difficulties and concerns. As a client at PPI, you have the right to:

1. Be treated with dignity and respect.
2. Participate in the planning of your counseling process and goals.
3. Understand clearly the nature and cost of the process.
4. Give informed consent to all aspects of the process.
5. Terminate your counseling at will.

**Psychiatric Consultation.** In keeping with the quality-assurance requirements of PPI's state-license, your counselor periodically will review the progress of your counseling with a PPI consulting psychiatrist. In addition, you may request a personal consultation with a PPI psychiatrist to discuss medical questions or concerns that might relate to your counseling, or to consider medication to help alleviate extreme feelings of depression or anxiety. Because PPI is primarily a counseling (rather than a psychiatric) resource, clients receiving medication through PPI must also see a PPI therapist on a regular basis.

**Peer Support Services.** Sometimes it can be helpful to connect and talk with others who have dealt with problems similar to your own. To facilitate this process, many of the counties in which PPI has

branch offices sponsor “Peer Support” services. Peer Support involves a broad range of activities in which service users within a given county share information and supportive activities with one another (e.g., phone calls, social visits, transportation, assistance in connecting with additional resources, and a drop-in center). If you are interested, your counselor can help you access one or more of these services, or you can learn more about them yourself by calling your county number:

*Allegheny County:* General information 412-227-0402; Warmline 1-866-661-WARM (9276)

*Armstrong-Indiana Counties:* General Information 724-548-3451

*Fayette County:* General Information 724-430-1370; Warmline 1-877-MHA-2466.

*Lawrence County:* General Information 724- 658-2538

*Washington County:* General Information 724-228-6832

*Westmoreland County:* General Information 1-800-353-6467

### **Emergencies**

In case of an emergency, your counselor (or a counselor on call) can be reached at any time of the day or night by dialing PPI’s main number at **412-661-1239** (or **1-877-661-9623**) and following the emergency instructions. You also can reach your County Crisis Line at the corresponding “general information” number in the above section, or you can receive immediate assistance by going to your nearest hospital emergency room.

### **Confidentiality**

Communication between you and your counselor is noted and kept in a confidential file. In general, and unless you sign a *release form*, the information in your file cannot be shared with anyone who is not directly involved in your treatment. In cases of couple or family counseling, all participants over the age of 18 must authorize this release. There is a reasonable copying charge for releasing information at your request.

All use, disclosure, and accessing of personal medical information is federally regulated by the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA). The packet of information you have received contains a *Notice of Privacy Practices*, which is a detailed summary of the provisions of this law. You are entitled to read it before signing any consent forms at PPI.

HIPAA does mandate some exceptions to absolute confidentiality. These include:

1. PPI’s right to use or disclose any medical information that is required for purposes of carrying out treatment and related health-care operations, and for obtaining payment for services.
2. The requirement that PPI counselors share with the proper authorities information regarding: reports or actions of suicidal or homicidal intent; evidence of child abuse; and situations of life-threatening medical emergency. In such instances, your consent is not required.

Beyond those restrictions stipulated in HIPAA, you may request additional restrictions on the use and disclosure of your medical information. PPI will cooperate as far as possible, but is not required to agree to such requests. Where there is agreement, however, the restriction will be binding on PPI.

Your therapy file and the information in it are the property of PPI; however, you have the right to review and discuss your file with your counselor, or to request a copy (at a reasonable charge).

### **Completion or Termination of Counseling**

By voluntarily agreeing to treatment, you also have the right to terminate services at any time, even if this is against professional advice. Generally, your counseling at PPI is considered completed when you have accomplished your treatment goals or you believe that continued counseling will be of no further help. In either case, please discuss this decision with your counselor in advance of your final session. This allows time to explore issues related to ending counseling and providing closure.

*Keeping appointments* is an essential part of the counseling process. Therefore, undue cancellations or missed appointments are grounds for discontinuing services. You are encouraged to discuss with your therapist his or her scheduling policy and to address any anticipated scheduling problems. As noted in your fee agreement, *nonpayment of fees also* is grounds for termination, or at least for a temporary discontinuation of service.

As an outpatient treatment facility, PPI is not equipped to deal effectively with certain types and levels of problems. These include: active alcohol or drug addiction; persistent suicidal or homicidal impulses, intents, or actions; and the management of certain types and doses of medication. In these or other cases in which PPI is neither an effective nor a suitable resource for your concerns, your counselor will discuss with you the advisability or the necessity of seeking help in a more appropriate setting.

As a client of PPI, you are expected to refrain from physical violence toward your counselor, PPI personnel, or other clients. Any such threat or act of violence is grounds for immediate termination of your relationship with PPI.

### **Waiting Room Courtesy**

Because the waiting room is small and exposed, it is important to be considerate of other clients' privacy and the need for as quiet and as undisturbed a space as possible. Children may not be left unattended in the waiting room, unless they can supervise themselves and respect the needs and rights of other clients. PPI staff cannot supervise children in the waiting room.

### **Feedback, Complaints, and Grievances**

Our ultimate goal at PPI is to enhance your health and well-being to the greatest extent possible, and to continually improve the quality and effectiveness of our services. Toward this end, confidential questionnaires are sent periodically to all clients. We welcome your candid feedback, both positive and negative. PPI also participates in the quality-assurance program instituted by the Consumer Action and Response Team of Allegheny County (CART), whose representatives are onsite each spring to interview anonymously any of our clients who would like to discuss the overall quality of their counseling experience. If you would like to participate, please inform your counselor, or you may contact CART directly, at any time, at 412-281-7333.

Each counseling relationship is unique and unfolds in its own time and way. Occasionally, a client and counselor are unable to establish an effective level of rapport, due to differences in style, personality, or

values. If you should sense that this is the case, do not hesitate to discuss it with your counselor. He or she will help you decide if the differences can be resolved or if you would find it more helpful to see someone else.

Similarly, if you should have a complaint or grievance about your counseling experience at PPI, you are encouraged to discuss the issue with your counselor, who will work with you for a satisfactory resolution. If the complaint or grievance cannot be settled with your counselor, or if you do not feel it is appropriate to discuss it with him or her, you may call Joanne Bassilios, our clinical director (412-661-1293 x 43). If you are dissatisfied with the response, you may appeal to Randall Hoedeman, our executive director (412-661-1239 x 14). And, again, you may also call CART at any time (412-281-7333).

### **Nondiscrimination of Service**

At PPI, admissions, the provision of services, and referrals of clients shall be made without regard to race, color, religious creed, disability, ancestry, national origin (including limited English proficiency), age, or sex.

Program services shall be made accessible to eligible individuals with disabilities through the most practical and economically feasible methods available. These methods include, but are not limit to, equipment redesign, the provision of aids, and the use of alternative service delivery locations. Structural modifications shall be considered only as a last resort among available methods.

Any client (and/or their guardian) who believes that he or she has been discriminated against may file a complaint of discrimination with:

County of Allegheny  
Department of Human Services  
Wood Street Commons, 304 Wood Street  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222-1900

and any or all of the following:

Department of Public Welfare  
Bureau of Equal Opportunity  
Room 223, Health & Welfare Building  
P.O. Box 2675  
Harrisburg, PA 17105

PA Human Relations Commission  
Eleventh Floor  
Pittsburgh State Office Building  
300 Liberty Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

Bureau of Equal Opportunity  
Department of Public Welfare  
Western Regional Office  
Room 702, Pittsburgh State Office Bldg.  
300 Liberty Avenue  
Pittsburgh, PA 15222

U. S. Department of Health and Human Services  
Office of Civil Rights  
Suite 372, Public Ledger Building  
150 South Independence Mall West  
Philadelphia, PA 19106-9111