

## What is Informed Consent?

Informed consent is a document that therapists use to make sure that their clients understand what therapy is about, and what their rights are.

- It is the therapist's responsibility to make sure that the client fully understands the information in the document before they sign it.

Informed consent describes the purpose of counselling, the benefits, and the possible risks.

- Benefits could include:
  - Gaining new skills.
  - Changing unwanted behaviours.
- Risks could include:
  - Opening painful memories.
  - Producing strong emotions.

Informed consent includes the therapist's qualifications and what professional associations they belong to.

- It should also provide contact information for filing a complaint against the therapist, if the client feels that they need to.

Informed consent explains the purpose for collecting information about the client, how the therapist uses it, and to whom they might share this information with.

- It should also explain the client's right to access their information.

Informed consent explains confidentiality, and the limits to it.

Informed consent explains that the client has a right to say no or withdraw from any part of therapy at any time.

Informed consent can be given by a minor if the therapist believes that they fully understand what they are agreeing to.

Informed consent can be given in written form, verbally, or through an action such as a head nod or thumbs up.

- During the first therapy session, however, informed consent should be formal and the client should provide written consent.
  - This is also true when exercises that might cause strong emotions are going to be used.

Informed consent is created to protect the client's rights and provides proof that the therapist has done their job to make sure the client understands all aspects of therapy.

- Informed consent does not protect the therapist from any inappropriate or harmful behaviour towards the client.

An informed consent document helps clarify who the client is.

- For example, if a parent brings their child in for individual counselling the child would be considered the client.

Informed consent should discuss the therapist's fee policy, and what happens for cancelled or missed appointments.

Informed consent is continuous - this means that the therapist might need to ask for consent more than once.

- A therapist should ask for consent again when any new aspect of therapy is being introduced.

## References

- British Columbia Association of Clinical Counsellors (2010, October). *Standard for Informed Consent to Clinical Counselling and the Collection, Use and Disclosure of Personal Information*. Retrieved from <https://bc-counsellors.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/09/1BCACC-Standards-Informed-Consent-2010.pdf>
- Pope, K.S., & Vasquez, M.J.T (2016). *Ethics in Psychotherapy and Counseling: A practical guide*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons.