



## **PRACTICE POLICIES**

North Star Evolving Wellness is an association of independently practicing clinicians who share a name, office space, consultation resources, and administrative functions. Your counselor is completely independent in providing you with clinical services and responsible for those services. As required by law, you will receive a document providing details about your clinician's specific training and qualifications.

### **SESSION TIME**

The standard individual session is 45-55 minutes and typically occurs weekly. If you are late, your session will end on time. Insurance companies may limit the minimum time required for a session, and arriving significantly late (more than 15 minutes) may mean we cannot meet that day. If you are late for three or more of your appointments it will be discussed to determine the possible impact on your therapy and potential termination. If your counselor is late, you will still receive your full session time either at the end of that session, or during a future session.

### **CANCELLATION POLICY**

Consistency is important for effective treatment and for business operations. An appointment is a commitment to our work and a time reserved for you. Rarely, your counselor may need to cancel and will make every effort to notify you and reschedule as soon as possible. If you need to change an appointment please call as soon as possible. In cases of illness or inclement weather, clients are encouraged to take advantage of Telehealth appointments.

Clients will not be charged for their first missed or canceled appointment for which 24 hours notice is not given. For all additional late cancellations (less than 24 hours) a \$50 fee will be charged. If your counselor can reschedule another appointment with you during the same week you will not be charged. If you no-show for your session, you will be charged the full fee of \$100. Off-site appointments represent a more significant time commitment and will be charged full fee for all missed/late cancelled appointments. Exceptions to these charges may be made only in extraordinary circumstances. All clients are required to maintain a credit card on file and authorize this card to be charged automatically for missed appointment fees.

Insurance companies do not reimburse for missed appointments and therefore you will be responsible to pay these fees. Missed appointments will be discussed openly, and if cancellations occur frequently, we will discuss if this is the right time for you to be receiving services. Repeated no-shows by any client may be cause for termination.

### **COMMUNICATION**

Counselors are often in sessions and not available by telephone. The main office phone is available and staff are generally able to answer scheduling and billing questions. When someone is unavailable the telephone is answered by voicemail that is monitored frequently. Calls are generally responded to within 3 hours during business hours or within 24hrs for after hours calls, with the exception of weekends, holidays and planned absences.



NSEW cannot ensure the confidentiality of any form of communication through electronic media, including text messages. The most secure form of contacting your counselor is messaging in the client portal. If you prefer to communicate via email or text messaging for issues regarding scheduling or cancellations doing so is at your own risk and the counselor's discretion. Email and text communications are not considered confidential or appropriate for emergency situations. If you make contact using either of these methods it is assumed you are aware of the risk and are giving consent for a response in kind. Some contact records may be stored in your file.

If you are in distress, you may attempt to call your counselor or the NSEW main line, however someone may not be able to respond immediately. If there is a true emergency, or you are feeling unsafe, it is important that you get the immediate help you need by going to an emergency room, calling 911, or calling your local crisis hotline (Washington County Mental Health (802-229-0591)). Clients requiring routine crisis response may be better served by, and referred to a higher level of care.

## SOCIAL MEDIA

Due to the importance of your confidentiality and the importance of minimizing dual relationships, counselors do not accept friend or contact requests from current or former clients on any social networking site (Facebook, LinkedIn, etc) or interact with clients on any of social platforms. Engaging clients as friends or contacts on these sites can compromise your confidentiality and our respective privacy. It may also blur the boundaries of the therapeutic relationship. Due to geolocation technology, networking and marketing algorithms, all digital communication and devices are a potential risk to privacy in ways that are outside our control.

## FEES

\$125 for initial assessments

\$110 for 55-minute individual sessions

\$100 for 45-minute individual sessions.

\$25 per 15 minutes for other professional services including team consultation, report writing, telephone conversations, attendance at meetings, working with other professionals you have authorized, preparation of records, and the time spent performing any other service you may request of me

\$250 per hour for involvement in legal issues including my time spent appearing in court, any time to prepare for that appearance, and travel time. You are responsible for paying for my professional time even if I am called to testify by another party.

## BILLING

It is expected that payment, including any copayment or coinsurance, is received at the time of your appointment unless there is another agreement in place or insurance coverage requires another arrangement. Payment is accepted by cash, check, and credit/debit/HSA cards. In circumstances of



unusual financial hardship, NSEW may be willing to negotiate a fee adjustment or payment plan and may require supporting documentation. If your account has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements have not been agreed upon, we may use legal means to secure payment. This may involve a collection agency or small claims court; such costs will be included in the claim. In most collection situations, the only information released is a name, the nature of services provided, and the amount due.

## INSURANCE

In order to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate what resources you have available to pay for your treatment. If you have a health insurance policy, it will usually provide some coverage for mental health treatment. Some plans require authorization before they provide reimbursement for mental health services or are limited to short-term treatment to work out specific problems. Some clients feel that they need more services, and some managed-care plans will not authorize ongoing care. If this is the case, you will be referred to another provider who will help you continue psychotherapy.

NSEW clinicians accept Vermont Medicaid, MVP, Cigna, and Blue Cross Blue Shield of VT. We may bill other insurance out-of-network, but you will be responsible to pay the uncovered balance. Most insurance companies require disclosure of your information for payment including diagnosis codes, treatment plans or summaries, or (rarely) copies of the entire record. This information will become part of the insurance company record. Insurance benefits are complex and you should carefully read your insurance coverage booklet; if you have questions, it is best to call your plan administrator. If you do choose to use insurance, please inquire if your policy provides coverage for mental health services and details of your plan before your first appointment including co-payment amount, if you have a deductible and number of sessions covered. We can assist you to receive the benefits to which you are entitled; however, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of fees.

**MINORS** - The state of Vermont permits minors to independently consent to counseling and does not restrict confidentiality to legal adulthood. This means that youth under 18 may enter and participate in therapy with the same privacy protections as adults, with or without their parent's consent. Some NSEW clinicians will only work with clients under 18 who are independently consenting with adult status and only with individuals developmentally mature enough to direct their own treatment. Releases may be signed for communication regarding billing, transportation, or other concerns on a case by case basis, and counselors will work with families to develop a plan of communication that fits best with each client's needs. Parental consent is not required for treatment, however, parents may be obligated to pay outstanding insurance balances, deductibles, or copays unless agreed upon otherwise at the onset of treatment. Ideally, all parties are in agreement about the nature of communication, and we will gladly explore all options available, however, we may not be the best fit for minor clients whose parents expect more thorough disclosure.

## EVALUATIONS

In accordance with professional ethical standards and informed legal practice, clinicians should not provide both evaluation and treatment services for clients simultaneously. NSEW will not provide assessment or documentation related to Emotional Support Animals.



## RECORDS

NSEW abides by laws and ethical standards to keep your treatment records. Records are stored in a secure encrypted electronic medical records platform. Insurance billing is completed by an integrated billing service that is also required to protect your health care information under state and federal law. You are entitled to request a copy of your records or a treatment summary. Due to the complex nature of clinical documentation, records may be misinterpreted, misunderstood, and upsetting to untrained readers. If you wish to view your records, we strongly recommend that you schedule a time to review them together and discuss the contents. Clients will be charged an appropriate fee for any professional time spent in responding to information requests.

## TERMINATION

Ending relationships can be difficult. Therefore, it is important to have a termination process in order to achieve some closure. The appropriate length of the termination depends on the length and intensity of the treatment. Termination will be discussed openly and may occur when goals are met, or if psychotherapy is not being effectively used, or if you are in default on payment. If therapy is terminated for any reason or you request another therapist, you will be provided with a list of qualified alternative options. You may also choose someone on your own or from another referral source. Should you fail to schedule an appointment for 30 days without notice, for legal and ethical reasons the professional relationship is discontinued.

## UNEXPECTED ABSENCE

In the event of an unplanned absence, whether due to injury, illness, death, or any other reason, clinicians maintain a detailed Professional Will with instructions for an Executor to contact you and ensure your continued care in accordance with your needs. You authorize the Executor and Secondary Executor to access your treatment and financial records only in accordance with the terms of the Professional Will, and only if an event has caused or is likely to cause a significant unplanned absence from practice.

## POLICY CHANGES

We have the right to change practices and the terms of this notice at any time provided that law permits the changes. If policy changes occur, this notice will be revised, posted on the website, and made available upon request.

## RESPONSE TO COVID-19

A safe space is foundational to the work we do together. We continue to closely monitor guidance from the experts at the Vermont Department of Health and US Center for Disease Control and Prevention around best practices to prevent transmission of COVID-19. We will continue to assess and adapt treatment decisions bearing in mind the complexities of personal and public health, treatment ethics, and individual needs. Interpersonal connection is valuable and preferable, however there are significant risks of meeting indoors given the limited ability to control contagion factors in the office, and the limitations of communication through masks. This will likely mean ongoing use of



*North Star Wellness*

Find your way \_\_\_\_\_

Po Box 1075 Montpelier VT 05601 - Phone: 802.252.2579 - Fax: 855.494.1575

---

Telehealth sessions until in person meetings may resume safely. NSW may be obligated to comply with legally mandated disclosure of client information for the purpose of contact tracing.

MY SIGNATURE BELOW INDICATES THAT I AM AGREEING THAT I HAVE READ, UNDERSTOOD AND AGREE TO THE ITEMS CONTAINED IN THIS DOCUMENT.

---

Signature

Printed Name

Date

---

Guardian Signature

Printed Name

Date