

POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

First Appointments: *The first few appointments are considered part of a consultative process.*

- *The first session is not therapy. It is a consultation for you to share more about your interest in counseling and for Gretchen to offer feedback about her approach. It is introductory and exploratory in nature. The focus will be on the presenting issue or concern and on questions related to the process of therapy in order to make a decision about continuing or not. Both parties will mutually decide if it is a good fit for continuing to meet.*
- *Fees for the first session are charged only if further appointments are scheduled.*
- *If it is agreed to proceed with meeting, the next few sessions are also consultative in the sense that it will continue to offer Gretchen and you a chance to assess whether ongoing consistent therapy would be beneficial, and to assess a goodness of fit between you and Gretchen. Therapy is viewed as a commitment to a brief period (6-8 weeks), or as series of brief periods, of work by individuals, couples, families, or groups.*

Appointments: *Sessions are by appointment only. Contact Gretchen Forbes at info@gretchenforbes.com or at 443-465-0545 for scheduling sessions. Initial sessions are generally 50 minutes and additional sessions are generally 50 minutes. In some cases appointments may be scheduled for 40 minutes or 80 minutes. If you are more than 15 minutes late for an appointment; Gretchen will assume you are not attending and the late cancellation fee will be applied. In specific circumstances if you are due to arrive more than 15 minutes late, please notify Gretchen (if safe to do so) and she will determine if there is sufficient time to meet.*

Fees/Payment:

- *Standard session fees are \$150/session. Full payment of fees is expected, by cash or check, at the time of service. Generally the last 5 minutes of a session will be reserved for future scheduling and payment. In some cases, scheduling and payment will be coordinated at the beginning of a session. There is a \$35 charge for returned checks. If your check does not clear or is returned, payment and future payments may be requested in advance of the session and/or in cash.*
- *Effective September 1, 2019, Gretchen is an out-of-network provider with all insurance companies. If you are billing out-of-network insurance, you are responsible for the fee at the time of service and you are responsible for submitting claims to the insurance company. Clients are responsible for verifying benefits prior to meeting.*

Cancellations: *If you must cancel an appointment Gretchen **requires 24 hour notice** which allows time to schedule another client. If you cancel an appointment for a Monday she must receive notice by 12 noon the previous Friday. If cancellations are made with less than 24 hour notice or after 12 noon on Friday for a Monday appointment, you will be billed a cancellation fee of \$75. In the event of a true emergency, which prevents you from keeping your appointment without sufficient time for notification, you should be in contact with Gretchen as soon as possible. The appointment will be rescheduled and the nature of the emergency will be discussed at the next appointment.*

Couples Cancellations: *With some couples and families, (if it is agreed upon in advance), if one member is unable to keep the appointment; an individual session with the other partner may be held. The intent of the individual session would be to work towards the larger systemic goals of the relationship. If an individual session occurs with one partner; at a future date an individual session may be scheduled with the other partner.*

Contacting Gretchen: In the case of a true life threatening emergency, call 911. For other urgent matters, it is best if you call Gretchen directly by phone and take the appropriate steps to ensure your safety.

- **Telephone Messages:** To leave a message for Gretchen, make changes, cancellations, ask billing or other questions etc. you may reach Gretchen at 443-465-0545. If Gretchen is unable to answer your call, please leave a message, and calls will be returned as soon as possible, as time and schedules permit. When Gretchen is out of town, a backup therapist and his/her contact information will be left on Gretchen's voicemail.
- **Emails/Texting:** Gretchen Forbes, LLC uses email/texting for administrative purposes. Texting is not a secure form of communication and should be for brief administrative exchanges only. Gretchen does not conduct therapy via text or email. Email/texting is not a fail-proof way of ensuring communication has been received successfully. If you do not hear back in 24 hours (excluding weekends), please assume that the communication message may have been inadvertently deleted or that there was an electronic error AND try sending the message again and/or use an alternate communication method.

Release with Medical Providers: For each client who takes prescription medication for depression/anxiety/sleep (and other mental health related issues) Gretchen Forbes, LLC requires a release to the prescribing Doctor or Psychiatrist. Additionally, per Gretchen's discretion, releases may be requested for medication taken for other physical concerns. This ensures collaboration of care as needed and is a standard of care for mental health. Releases are obtained at the commencement of therapy. Failure to accurately note medications may result in termination of treatment. Additionally, releases are required for clients currently or recently involved in individual counseling and may be requested for other previous providers.

Snow/Inclement Weather: In the event of inclement weather, as soon as reasonably possible, it is expected that the client communicate with Gretchen regarding any changes in availability. Texting works well in these scenarios. Additionally, Gretchen will reach out as soon as possible. The client and Gretchen will mutually assess options including whether it is prohibitive to meet, whether the appointment time can be shifted earlier or later, and whether school delays affect availability. There is no cancellation fee for inclement weather.

Weapons Policy: Appointments are held in a weapons free environment. If you carry, it is required that you leave your weapon in the car. Any issues with this should be reported to Gretchen before the commencement of therapy.

Infants/Children in Session: With the exception of family counseling, it is expected that children who are mobile will not attend sessions with their caregivers. Parents of infants are welcome to bring their infant and may feed as needed in sessions. There is no diaper changing station so please bring any necessary diapering supplies including a changing pad/blanket. Any special circumstances should be addressed with Gretchen in advance of the scheduled session.

Receipts/Statements: A statement of activity will be provided as requested by the client and as often as requested.

Insurance: Gretchen Forbes does not accept assignment of benefits from insurance carriers for which she is not "participating" or "out-of-network". Clients are responsible to pay the session fee and accept reimbursement from the insurance company. NOTE: By law, all claims must be paid or denied within 30 days of submission. Your insurance plan may require: referral from a medical doctor, precertification, on-going treatment plan, etc. for payment of benefits to be received. This varies widely from one policy to another. Please check your benefits requirements carefully. **Please let Gretchen know what your insurance company is requesting for reimbursement. If you are submitting for insurance reimbursement, you can mail the statement along with your insurance carrier's claim form to your insurance carrier. Lost insurance forms by yourself or your insurance company will be assessed an additional charge.**

Confidentiality: Gretchen Forbes is ethically bound to guard your confidentiality. No disclosure as to the nature of your treatment will be made without your signed consent. However, the law limits the right of confidentiality under certain conditions. Confidentiality will not be maintained in the following circumstances: child abuse, elder abuse, suicidal or homicidal threat, if you report having sexual relations with a prior therapist and in criminal or tort issues. Confidentiality is also not maintained in the event that Gretchen is subpoenaed (see below). Also see below for confidentiality with regards to couples and family counseling and with regards to professional consultation. In the event that you and Gretchen see each other in public; out of respect for you and your privacy, Gretchen will not initiate contact. You are welcome to initiate contact with her after which she will respond.

Court Practices: Gretchen Forbes does not go to court to testify on your behalf. In the event that Gretchen is subpoenaed to provide information about you; ANY and ALL records may be revealed. In the event that Gretchen must appear in court, her time will be billed at an hourly rate of \$300/ hour. The fees will include every second of preparation, transportation time, waiting time and court time. These fees are not reimbursable by insurance. Such fees would be due and payable up front and in advance of Gretchen appearing in court.

Confidentiality with regards to couples and family counseling: When working with a couple or family unit, Gretchen does not maintain secrets. Any secrets would need to be shared with the other parties for Gretchen to be able to continue working with the couple or family unit. Couples communication with Gretchen, outside of session, by text or email, should have the other partner "carbon copied". If information about one member of the couple or family unit is requested by subpoena the whole file, containing information about all members of the therapeutic unit may be disclosed.

Professional Consultation: Gretchen engages in ongoing professional consultation and supervision with other licensed mental health practitioners. In these instances any client information shared will be shared anonymously and confidentially.

HIPAA: Gretchen Forbes, LLC is HIPAA Compliant and has available, to all clients, copies of the Notice of Privacy Practices. A policy is listed online and is also available at the office.

Telehealth Practices: Gretchen Forbes may conduct Telehealth via a secure platform as needed during a pandemic or situations when attending in person is ill advised. Telehealth has a separate informed consent. Telehealth will be conducted only with people currently in the State of MD and for people presenting therapy issues that are appropriate for telehealth.