**Into the Wild Counselling Policies and Procedures**

**1. Confidentiality Policy**

**Purpose**:
To ensure client confidentiality and uphold professional ethical standards in accordance with the Data Protection Act (2018), GDPR, and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy (BACP) guidelines.

**Policy**:
All information shared in counselling sessions is confidential. The Counsellor will not disclose any information about the client to third parties without the client’s explicit consent, except in the following circumstances:

* If the client poses an imminent risk to themselves or others.
* If there is suspicion of abuse, including child or vulnerable adult abuse.
* If there is a legal obligation to disclose information (e.g., court orders).

Client records will be stored securely and kept for a period of **7 years** after the termination of therapy. These records will be accessible only to the Counsellor.

**Procedure**:

* At the initial session, the confidentiality policy is explained to the client and included in the signed agreement.
* Consent forms for data storage and any necessary disclosures (such as communication with other healthcare providers) will be signed by the client.
* Any disclosures will be discussed with the client before action is taken, unless it compromises safety.
* All session notes and records are securely stored in encrypted digital files, with only the Counsellor having access.

**2. Data Protection and GDPR Policy**

**Purpose**:
To comply with the Data Protection Act (2018) and GDPR regulations regarding the collection, storage, and processing of client data.

**Policy**:
Client information will be handled in compliance with GDPR, ensuring that data is:

* Processed lawfully, fairly, and transparently.
* Collected for specified, legitimate purposes.
* Adequate, relevant, and limited to what is necessary.
* Accurate and kept up to date.
* Stored securely and retained only for as long as necessary.

**Procedure**:

* Clients will be informed about the types of data collected and how it will be used and stored.
* Clients have the right to access their records, correct inaccuracies, and request deletion (where legally possible).
* Personal data will be kept in encrypted digital files or in secure physical locations.
* When the retention period expires (after 7 years), client records will be securely deleted or destroyed.

**3. Safeguarding Policy**

**Purpose**:
To protect clients, particularly vulnerable adults and children, from harm during the provision of counselling services.

**Policy**:
The Counsellor has a duty of care to protect clients from harm, abuse, and neglect. This policy covers both in-office sessions and walk-and-talk therapy, ensuring the safety of clients at all times. Safeguarding procedures apply to all clients but are especially critical for minors or vulnerable adults.

**Procedure**:

* **Risk Assessments**: Risk assessments will be conducted prior to sessions, particularly for walk-and-talk therapy, to ensure the safety of the environment and activities.
* **Reporting Concerns**: Any concerns about a client’s welfare or potential abuse will be reported to appropriate authorities, in line with local safeguarding procedures. The client will be informed of this unless doing so increases the risk of harm.
* **Safety Measures for Walk-and-Talk Therapy**: Clients will be briefed on safety measures, including wearing appropriate clothing and footwear. A safe location with easy access to assistance will always be selected for outdoor sessions.

**4. Emergency Procedures**

**Purpose**:
To outline procedures in the event of an emergency during a counselling session, particularly during outdoor or mobile therapy sessions.

**Policy**:
The Counsellor will have clear plans in place for managing emergencies, including medical, mental health, or environmental emergencies.

**Procedure**:

* **Medical Emergency**: If a client experiences a medical emergency during a session (including during walk-and-talk sessions), the Counsellor will immediately contact emergency services (999) and provide first aid if safe and qualified to do so.
* **Mental Health Crisis**: If a client is in crisis (e.g., expressing suicidal ideation or intent), the session will be paused to assess the risk, and the client may be referred to emergency mental health services. The Counsellor will help arrange for emergency support if needed.
* **Environmental Emergency (Walk-and-Talk Therapy)**: In the case of sudden adverse weather or dangerous conditions during walk-and-talk sessions, the session will be paused and the client will be safely escorted to shelter or rescheduled.

**5. Walk-and-Talk Therapy Policy**

**Purpose**:
To provide safe and effective walk-and-talk therapy while minimizing risks associated with outdoor counselling.

**Policy**:
Walk-and-talk therapy involves holding counselling sessions outdoors, typically in parks or other public spaces. This policy ensures that both client and counsellor are aware of the potential risks and benefits of outdoor therapy.

**Procedure**:

* **Risk Assessment**: A risk assessment will be conducted before each session to evaluate weather, terrain, and environmental conditions.
* **Client Responsibilities**: Clients are responsible for wearing appropriate clothing and footwear for the session, including weather-appropriate attire.
* **Cancellation Policy**: Sessions may be cancelled or moved to an indoor setting if the weather poses a risk or discomfort (e.g., heavy rain, high winds, icy conditions).
* **Confidentiality in Public Spaces**: The Counsellor will take care to maintain confidentiality during walk-and-talk sessions. If sensitive topics arise while in the presence of others, the conversation may be paused or moved to a quieter area.

**6. Payments and Fee Policy**

**Purpose**:
To ensure clarity and transparency in the payment of counselling fees.

**Policy**:
All clients are required to pay for their sessions promptly, as per the agreed terms. The session fee is £65 and must be paid by the end of the session unless otherwise agreed.

**Procedure**:

* Payments can be made via cash, card, or online payment services (e.g., Stripe).
* Clients will receive a reminder of their upcoming appointment and payment options at least 24 hours before the session.
* Invoices will be issued upon request, and receipts will be provided for all payments made.
* **Late Payments**: If a payment is not made on time, the Counsellor reserves the right to cancel or postpone future appointments until the outstanding balance is cleared.
* **Cancellation Fees**: Clients who cancel with less than 48 hours’ notice or fail to attend their session will be charged 50% of the session fee.

**7. Cancellation and Missed Appointments Policy**

**Purpose**:
To maintain fairness and consistency in handling cancellations and missed appointments.

**Policy**:
Clients must provide at least 48 hours' notice if they wish to cancel or reschedule an appointment. Failure to provide adequate notice will result in a charge of 50% of the session fee.

**Procedure**:

* Clients can cancel appointments via phone, email, or text message.
* If the client cancels less than 48 hours before the session or does not attend, they will be billed for 50% of the session fee.
* In the event of unforeseen circumstances (e.g., sudden illness), the Counsellor may waive the cancellation fee at their discretion.

**8. Client Feedback and Complaints Procedure**

**Purpose**:
To provide clients with a structured process for giving feedback or raising concerns about the services they receive.

**Policy**:
Clients have the right to provide feedback or make a formal complaint if they are dissatisfied with any aspect of the service provided by Into the Wild Counselling.

**Procedure**:

* Clients may raise concerns during sessions or contact the Counsellor via email or phone to discuss issues outside of sessions.
* All complaints will be addressed in a timely and professional manner. The Counsellor will work with the client to find a resolution.
* If a resolution cannot be found, the client may seek mediation or file a formal complaint with a relevant professional body (e.g., BACP).

**9. Professional Boundaries Policy**

**Purpose**:
To ensure that appropriate boundaries are maintained between the Counsellor and the Client throughout the counselling process.

**Policy**:
The Counsellor will maintain professional boundaries in all interactions with clients. This includes avoiding dual relationships, keeping communication professional, and ensuring that the therapeutic relationship remains focused on the client’s well-being.

**Procedure**:

* Any out-of-session contact (via email, phone, etc.) will be limited to administrative purposes, such as scheduling or payment.
* Social contact between the Counsellor and the Client outside of sessions is discouraged unless agreed upon within professional boundaries.
* The Counsellor will not engage in any form of personal, social, or business relationship with the Client outside of the counselling setting.

These policies and procedures form the framework for the day-to-day operations of **Into the Wild Counselling** and ensure that both client and counsellor understand their rights and responsibilities.