
Geetika Virdi

Informed Consent

Welcome!

First, we would like to commend you on the sometimes difficult decision to come to counselling. Getting started can often be the toughest part. Before we start the counselling process, we will explore information that will help you understand the possible risks and benefits associated with counselling. The purpose of informed consent is to build safety and understanding within our therapeutic relationship, in order to get the best possible results.

We will continue to revisit informed consent throughout our therapeutic relationship, if we're trying a new therapeutic tool or if any of the circumstances in our therapy change. Informed consent is an ongoing, collaborative process.

Geetika Virdi acknowledges with respect and gratitude that the land on which we work is on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples - xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish), and sə́lilwə́təʔ (Tsleil-Waututh) Nations, whose ancient relationships with the land continue to this day.

What is Counselling? What are the Risks and Benefits?

Counselling can be quite different than talking to a friend or loved one. Counselling provides a space and opportunity for you to explore behaviour, relationships, feelings, or thoughts that trouble you and cause difficulty in your life. Counselling is also a legitimate source of support in a crisis or during a difficult time. As the counsellor, Geetika will provide empathic support and will help you challenge old ways of thinking or behaving that aren't serving you anymore. If you've tried counselling before, Geetika will probably ask you what was helpful and unhelpful about the counselling you've had. This is so we can tailor our services to your specific wants and needs. If this is your first time trying counselling, we will figure out what works best for you over time.

The benefits of empathic support and changing unhelpful ways of thinking can be drastic. You may start to feel more self-compassion, understand hurtful or unhealthy habits, and create new ways of thinking and behaving. Counselling can also bring deeper personal insight and awareness, better ways of understanding and coping with problems, and improved relationships.

You should know however, counselling sometimes requires that you be willing to examine difficult topics or times in your life, to experience stronger than usual emotions, and to try out new and different behaviours. These changes in behaviours may result in changes in personal relationships, some of which can be positive, some can be challenging. Finally, changes through counselling often require persistent effort in your life and typically take a bit of time.

What's an example of a risk and benefit? Let's say a woman comes to counselling because she has extremely low self-worth and is sick of hating herself. Through an empathic, supportive relationship with her therapist, she starts to love herself more. However, through therapy she also realises the reason she has low self-worth is because her family was never very supportive to her, and often cut her down verbally. She starts to distance herself from the hurtful family members, resulting in more tension. Although the woman feels drastically better overall, she is now trying to figure out how to set strong boundaries with family and some hurtful friends too.

Consent in Counselling

What you choose to discuss and explore in counselling is all up to you. You are the boss! The counsellor's job is to truly understand your struggles and goals, so Geetika can help you fully utilise your existing strengths and find your own solutions. At various times in counselling, your counsellor might recommend various therapeutic activities or "homework", and you can always give or deny consent at any time in the counselling process.

The Counselling Relationship

Multiple studies over the years have shown that the most important predictor of success in counselling is the relationship you have with your counsellor. At the beginning of counselling, you will just be getting to know Geetika and her style of work. We recommend trying at least three sessions to determine if this is a good fit for your needs. Ideally, you'll feel honoured, respected and cared for in your counselling sessions.

The counselling relationship is different from other relationships in that it's relatively one sided. You will most likely be sharing quite a few details about yourself and your life, while the counsellor will share few details about her personal life. This ensures the focus can be kept on you. This is your time to feel cared for and explore your struggles, so Geetika will maintain necessary boundaries to avoid overlapping or dual relationships. For example, the counsellor will not:

- Engage in any other business with you other than therapy
- Be your therapist if they are your friend or family member
- Engage in a friendship, romantic, or sexual relationship with current or former clients
- Give medical, legal or financial advice
- Receive gifts (other than small token gifts such as a thank you card)
- Be your teacher, supervisor or evaluator while engaged in counselling with you
- Be connected on social media (e.g.- cannot accept "friend requests")

Geetika understands that finding the right "fit" is a very individual process and we don't take offence when people decide to switch. Our only goal is that you find counselling helpful. Alternatively, there is a very small chance that your counsellor may recommend you see a different counsellor if she feels there is a conflict of interest or she is not the best counsellor for your needs. If this is the case, Geetika will be as transparent as possible to let you know the reason for her recommendation.

In order to maintain the safety of your therapy, please don't attend sessions under the influence of drugs or alcohol. This will ensure that your participation in counselling is voluntary and intentional. If you seem as though you're under the influence of alcohol or drugs, Geetika may recommend you to end the session and return another day. If this is the case, the fee for the session would still apply. If attending counselling substance free is going to be difficult, please talk to your counsellor to discuss a safe-enough solution.

Counsellor Qualifications

Geetika Virdi holds a Master's degree in Counselling Psychology. She engages in various post graduate training in order to provide effective, ethical counselling services. Your counsellor is a Registered Clinical Counsellor with the British Columbia Association of Clinical Counsellors (BCACC). The BCACC provides continuing education, code of ethics, as well as accountability in care. Geetika is also a registered service provider with the Crime Victim Assistance Program (CVAP).

As a counsellor, Geetika uses many modes of therapy including but not limited to: Emotion Focused Therapy, Experiential therapies, Attachment-based approaches and Somatic modalities. We will discuss the best approach that will help you reach your goals.

At the bottom of this form, Geetika has noted her professional ID number, and this information will also be provided on each emailed receipt you receive after every paid session.

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is a necessary condition of counselling, often because the things that people need to share are what they don't want other people to know about. Confidentiality continues after the end of the counselling relationship. This means your counsellor will not speak with anyone but you about your story and situation.

In order to provide the best counselling possible and for the counsellor's continued clinical development, Geetika will occasionally talk with a clinical supervisor or colleagues about some of the issues you are dealing with. Clinical supervisors or colleagues will be bound by the same confidentiality as your counsellor. As part of the supervision and clinical development process, Geetika may ask your consent to record one or more of your sessions. The counsellor will review the "recorded sessions informed consent form" with you prior to recording anything, and of course you can choose to deny consent to this with no penalty to you or your counselling relationship.

If you would like me to share information with anyone else outside of Peak Resilience, we will discuss the risks and benefits of this, and you can sign a release of information form stating what information you'd like released, to whom, over what period of time. You have the right to revoke this permission at any time. An example of a benefit of getting a release to contact another person would be to coordinate care with a doctor or psychiatrist.

Limitations to Confidentiality

There are three important limits to maintaining confidentiality all counsellors must follow. These primarily concern risks of harm:

- There is risk of harm or neglect to a child or vulnerable/dependent adult
- If a counsellor believes you are at risk of harming yourself or another person;
- For the purposes of complying with a legal requirement such as requests from ICBC, WorkSafeBC, or any subpoenas by a court of law.

Communication

We want communication to be as convenient and confidential as possible. If you need to contact Geetika, please email her at geetika@geetikavirdicounselling.com. We use the Google email service, which is consistently leading the industry in encryption and security, but we still recommend that you don't email sensitive health related information.

Please do not email or call if you are currently in crisis, as we cannot guarantee an immediate response. If you are in crisis, please call the crisis centre at 1-800-784-2433 or emergency services at 9-1-1.

Your Personal Information

Your personal information is only collected to be utilised by myself in the delivery of counselling services to you. Your personal information will not be disclosed to any third party without expressed, written consent by you or in the case of the above limits to confidentiality.

As a part of counselling, records are kept of your therapy sessions. These records include minimal information that is important for your counsellor to remember when providing ethical and effective care. We aim to include the most minimal information possible in your notes, to decrease possible harm that may occur on the very low chance your file is legally requested by outside parties. Our files are electronic and we use a Vancouver-based company called "JaneApp" to manage our clinic information, scheduling and credit card payments. The data in our system is encrypted using 256-bit encryption when sent between our device and the Jane servers (in the same way as your banking information would be). If you'd like more detailed information about the privacy in the Jane system, please visit

janeapp.com/guide/basics/security-faq. At any time, you may simply request a copy of your file, and one will be made available within 30 days with an administration fee of \$50.00.

Your records with Geetika Viridi will be kept in perpetuity unless a clear request is made to the contrary.

Length, Frequency, and Termination of Sessions

While appointments are typically scheduled in one hour blocks, you will actually receive 50 minutes of direct time each session. This allows for 50 minutes of clinical expertise, then 10 minutes to record notes from your session. The frequency of sessions will be determined and negotiated during our time together, based on your situation and goals.

You are free to terminate counselling at any time and there is no pressure to continue to attend counselling. If you decide to end your counselling, we hope you can find a way to discuss your contemplation regarding completing counselling with me. If we haven't heard from you in a while, we may email or call you to follow up. This is so the counsellor can ensure you have all the necessary resources in place.

Feedback Process

During each session (most likely close to the end of the session), your counsellor will ask for your feedback regarding how you felt the session went. This is a great time for you to reflect on the session and express what stood out to you, what you found helpful and what wasn't as helpful. If the feedback process does not satisfy your concerns you can contact the BCACC.

Should you decide to pursue legal action against your counsellor, you agree that the courts of the province of British Columbia shall have exclusive jurisdiction to hear any complaint, demand, claim, or cause of action that arises from your relationship with Geetika Viridi.

Counselling Rates

Fees are designed to make high quality, ethical, and sustainable therapy available to more people.

Session fees are set at \$169+GST per 50 minutes for individuals and \$220+GST per 50 minutes for couples, and are due prior to or at the end of each session. For extended sessions, rates will increase proportionally to the time allotted. [Here's a chart of various rates](#) (if you're reading a paper copy, please ask your counsellor or admin to print the chart out) at Peak Resilience, and we reserve the right to increase our rates by up to 5% per year to cover costs such as inflation (on an as-needed basis). If rates will increase by up to 5%, we'll communicate this information to our clients and community three months in advance of the change. We believe the quality of the services we provide are commensurate with our rates. If you have any questions or

concerns about your session rate, please speak with your counsellor or Jennifer Hollinshead (founder and clinical director of Peak Resilience) at jennifer@peak-resilience.com.

Emailed receipts will be issued for each paid session and will include the counsellor's name and professional association ID number for insurance claims. Receipts can only be provided for services that have been rendered, and can only be issued to the individual receiving the services (we cannot provide receipts in advance or with anyone else's name).

Receipts can be submitted to your extended health care benefits provider after each session. Please confirm with your health care provider to ensure that Registered Clinical Counsellors and/or Registered Social Workers are covered in your plan. Please also confirm what types of counselling (individual, relationship, group) are covered.

If you determine certain professionals or types of counselling are not covered, you have the option to write a letter to your employer or benefits provider to ask them to include them in your plan. Health care spending accounts can often cover the cost of counselling as well.

Cancellation Policy

Clients will be charged their full session fee for all missed sessions or sessions cancelled with less than 48 hours notice. Clients arriving late for appointments are entitled to receive the remainder of the scheduled appointment for the full appointment fee. If you are unable to pay the fee for your session, we will be unable to provide counselling services until the balance is paid.

We charge the full fee for missed and late appointment times because we are charged for various overhead costs, so missed appointments are very expensive for us. In addition, your missed appointment or late cancellation means we were not able to schedule someone else in that time spot. We hope you understand this policy, and invite you to discuss it further with if you have any questions or concerns.

Session rates must be paid by credit card, exclusively.

We understand accessing private practice counselling services can be a financial investment. We invite you to reassess your investment in counselling with your counsellor directly. We hope you feel the return on your investment has been exceptional.

No Symptom Policy

We've learned a LOT from the pandemic- including wiping out colds and flus because we were isolating when we had symptoms! So, moving forward (pandemic or *hopefully* no pandemic), our cancellation policy now includes a no-symptoms policy.

For our in-office clients:

Please email me to request that your appointment be changed from “in person” to “virtual” if you (or anyone you have been in close contact with) has communicable disease symptoms and/or a confirmed case of COVID-19. If you come into our physical office with communicable disease symptoms, your appointment will be cancelled and you will be charged the full fee. We love you, we just don’t love your cold!

Communicable disease symptoms include (but are not limited to):

- Fever
- Runny nose/nasal congestion
- Cough, sore throat and/or difficulty swallowing
- New loss or decrease in sense of taste or smell
- Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing
- Headache
- Chills
- Hoarse voice
- Unexplained fatigue or aches and pains
- Nausea/Vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain

For clients who access in-office services (in addition to clients who access us virtually), we’ll email you a unique recurring Zoom link to access your virtual counselling sessions.

How to find your recurring zoom link:

- Save the email you received with your Zoom link or
- Find it in your document sharing centre at peakresilience.janeapp.com

When in doubt, stay home and take advantage of virtual sessions so we can keep the most vulnerable members of our community safe.

What about the counsellor?

Our no-symptom policy extends to our staff. We reserve the right to change your in-person session to a virtual session if I am experiencing communicable disease symptoms and cannot access the office. If this should happen, we will notify you as soon as possible and point you to your recurring zoom link for your session time.

We expect that switching from in-person to virtual sessions will be relatively common throughout the cold and flu season, and we appreciate your patience and understanding.

Virtual Video Counselling

Should you ever choose to book a “Virtual” Counselling Appointment, you will be emailed a unique and recurring Zoom link to access all virtual counselling sessions. We recommend that you save the original email you receive for quick retrieval.

Should I ever choose to receive virtual counselling, I consent to using the virtual platform Zoom (<https://zoom.us/>) and I fully understand:

About Online Video Zoom Sessions:

- Zoom is an online communication tool allowing face-to-face video, voice, or text-based chat/dialogue. Zoom calling is encrypted to protect sensitive information. For more information on how Zoom keeps its client’s information private, please visit and review the information at the links below. →

https://zoom.us/docs/doc/PIPEDA_PHIPA%20Canadian%20Public%20Information%20Compliance%20Guide.pdf

- Zoom software is available on any computer or smart phone/tablet. Ensure that your device is password protected and only you have access to the password. In addition, use a password protected private Internet connection when on a Zoom call. You may wish to choose a username that does not identify you by name to ensure more privacy.

- Any Internet-based communication is not 100% guaranteed to be secure/confidential. Your counsellor has made every reasonable effort to implement technical security measures that reduce risks of a confidentiality breach.

- I have read the privacy and encryption information for Zoom and I agree that my counsellor should not be held responsible if any outside party gains access to Zoom account information or transaction by bypassing online security measures.

My Responsibilities as the Client:

- I am responsible for ensuring confidentiality by closing other programs on my computer while in a video session, planning ahead to minimize distractions, and not answering calls or text messages while on the Zoom call.

- I also agree to be online five minutes prior to the scheduled video counselling appointment (preferably in a quiet room alone with the door closed). Headphones may be used to increase privacy of session.

- I agree that I will not use Zoom in an emergency situation that needs immediate attention, whereby I am considering harming myself or someone else. If a life threatening crisis should

occur, I agree to contact 911 or the 24 hour suicide hotline at 1-800-SUICIDE, or go to the nearest Emergency Room.

- I agree to pay via credit card provided to the counsellor prior to the session.
- I agree to read the general informed consent form in addition to this form prior to starting video counselling sessions.

Counsellor Responsibilities:

- The counsellor will Zoom call the client at the scheduled appointment time.
- The counsellor will ensure to be alone in their office with a high quality, password protected wireless Internet connection.
- The counsellor will ensure all other distractions such as phone calls are eliminated during the video counselling session.
- Technical problems may occur. If a call is disrupted, the counsellor will call back unless technical difficulties persist. In such cases, the session can be continued via phone or rescheduled via phone or email, depending on client's preferences.
- If technical problems persist and the client does not want to continue the counselling session over the phone, the price of the session will be prorated based on the amount of time that has elapsed. For example, if half the session time has elapsed before the technical problems began, the client will be charged for half the session.
- Payment for the session must be processed immediately following the appointment. Payment can be made via credit card provided to the counsellor for safe, encrypted, online processing.

Acknowledgement of Informed Consent

My signature below indicates I understand and accept the preceding statements. I have had an opportunity to discuss the contents of this informed consent with my counsellor, had my questions answered to my satisfaction, and am fully prepared to enter into a counselling agreement with my counsellor.

Name of Client		Signature	
Geetika Virdi	Signature		Date

BCACC #20447

The information provided in the informed consent process was adapted from various sources including:

The BC Association of Clinical Counsellors Standard for Informed Consent to Clinical Counselling and the Collection, use and Disclosure of Personal Information
<http://bc-counsellors.org/app/uploads/2015/09/1BCACC-Standards-Informed-Consent-2010.pdf>

Informed Consent for Counselling at the University of Lethbridge Counselling Services
http://www.uleth.ca/sites/default/files/informed_consent_U_of_L_sept_9_2010.pdf

BC Association of Clinical Counsellors Personal Information Protection Act: A Counsellor's Guide for Developing Client Personal Information Protection Policies and Procedures
<http://bc-counsellors.org/app/uploads/2015/10/PIPA-ACounsellorsGuideOctober2004.pdf>

BC Association of Clinical Counsellors Payment for Clinical Counselling Practice Standards

<http://bc-counsellors.org/app/uploads/2015/09/2BCACC-Standard-Payment-Clinical-Counselling-Services-2010.pdf>

BC Association of Clinical Counsellors Standard for the use of Technology in Counselling

<http://bc-counsellors.org/app/uploads/2015/09/7BCACC-Standard-Use-of-Technology-2011.pdf>

G-Suite Email Service Provider Security FAQ

<https://gsuite.google.com/faq/security>

Jane App Guide: Basics- Security-FAQ

<https://janeapp.com/guide/basics/security-faq>

Jane App: Privacy

<https://janeapp.com/privacy>