# Talking With Laura Counselling
## Informed Consent

### Welcome to Peak Resilience & Talking With Laura!

First, I 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.

Laura Offenwanger acknowledges with respect and gratitude that the land on which we work is on the unceded territory of the Coast Salish peoples - xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam), Sḵwx̱wú7mesh (Squamish), and səlilwətaɬ (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, I 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, I 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, you and I 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! My job is to truly understand your struggles and goals, so I can help you fully utilise your existing strengths and find your own solutions. At various times in counselling, I 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 me and how I work. We recommend trying at least three sessions to determine if I am 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 I will share few details about my personal life. This ensures the focus can be kept on you. This is your time to feel cared for and explore your struggles, so I will maintain necessary boundaries to avoid overlapping or dual relationships. For example, I will not:

- Engage in any other business with you other than therapy
- Be your therapist if I am 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")

If for some reason you don't feel like I am the right fit for you, I would be happy to support you as you transfer to another counsellor.

I, Laura Offenwanger, understand that finding the right "fit" is a very individual process and I don't take offence when people decide to switch. My only goal is that you find counselling helpful. Alternatively, there is a very small chance that I may recommend you see a different counsellor if I feel there is a conflict of interest or I am not the best counsellor for your needs. If this is the case, I will be as transparent as possible to let you know the reason for my 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, I 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 me to discuss a safe-enough solution.

## Counsellor Qualifications

I, Laura Offenwanger, hold a Master of Arts in Counselling Psychology. I engage in various post graduate training in order to provide effective, ethical counselling services. I am a Canadian Clinical Counsellor (CCC) with the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA). The CCPA provides continuing education, code of ethics, as well as accountability.

I can discuss my background with you specifically in your first session, or whenever you have questions about my background or education. You can also read my bio at https://www.peak-resilience.com/laura-offenwanger/ for more information.

As a counsellor, I use many modes of therapy including but not limited to: Person Centred Therapy, Emotionally Focused Therapy, Mindfulness Based Cognitive Therap, Strengths-Based Therapy, Experiential Therapy, and the Developmental Model (relationship counselling). I will discuss the best approach that will help you reach your goals.

At the bottom of this form, I will note my 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 I 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, I 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 I. As part of the supervision and clinical development process, I 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.

The team of counsellors at Peak Resilience have access to all client files. However, our code of ethics enforces a "need to know" policy- so we only access information on a need to know basis and will not look up clients unless there is a specific reason to. For example, if you wanted to change counsellors, your new counsellor could access your information to continue your care.

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

I want communication to be as convenient and confidential as possible. If you need to contact me, you can call Peak Resilience reception at 604-682-PEAK (7325) and provide your first name and the number they can reach you at.

Another easy, fast way of reaching me directly is through my direct email laura@talkingwithlaura.ca. I 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. The email correspondence between yourself and Laura Offenwanger will be copied into your account file, so I can provide the best and most seamless care possible.

When you call our main reception or email our general admin@peak-resilience.com email, our reception or administration staff can access your information on our system. We will only access the information that is necessary to help you at that time (such as your name, contact information and appointment time). All of our staff are bound by an oath of confidentiality and will not release any of your information at any time. Reception staff only have access to your profile information (name, address etc) and are unable to access your clinical notes.

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.

In general, feel free to email or call if you have relatively simple inquiries. If you have more complex issues to discuss, those are best left for your therapy sessions (unless you have discussed an email counselling arrangement with I directly).

## 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 me to remember when providing ethical and effective care. I 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 my 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 Peak Resilience will be kept in perpetuity unless a clear request is made to the contrary. Should I pass away unexpectedly, another counsellor at Peak Resilience will take responsibility for my clinical records. Any records older than three years will be destroyed. All current clients will be asked if they wish their records to be transferred to a new counsellor. All remaining records will be destroyed once the three year mark is reached.

## 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 I 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), I 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.

Sometimes giving feedback can feel uncomfortable. Ideally, we can build safety within our counselling relationship so giving feedback feels somewhat scary but doable. If you are unable to discuss feedback with me, believe that I will be unwilling to listen and respond, or that I have behaved unethically, please inform the Clinical Director of Peak Resilience, Jennifer Hollinshead at jennifer@peak-resilience.com.

If the feedback process within Peak Resilience does not satisfy your concerns you can contact the CCPA.

Should you decide to pursue legal action against myself at Talking With Laura Counselling or Peak Resilience 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 Talking With Laura Counselling.

## Counselling Rates

Talking With Laura Counselling is an alternative counselling practice, which means our clients pay counsellors directly for service. Our fees are designed to make high quality, ethical, and sustainable therapy available to more people. This means our regular rates supplement our lower cost or free services (such as services for indigenous clients). Here's an article (if you're reading a paper copy, please ask I or admin to print the article out) explaining where your money goes at Talking With Laura and/or Peak Resilience in more detail if you're interested.

Session fees are set at $174 per 50 minutes for individuals and $227 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 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 me or Jennifer Hollinshead (founder and clinical director) at jennifer@peak-resilience.com.

Emailed receipts will be issued for each paid session and will include my 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). We can provide invoices (that show the outstanding balance) for future sessions at the client's request. This can be helpful if another party is covering the payment.

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 may be paid by credit card, interac E-transfer to admin@peak-resilience.com, cash or cheque made out to Peak Resilience. When paying by cash, no change will be provided. If a cheque cannot be honoured due to insufficient funds, a $25.00 administration fee will be charged in addition to the session fee.

We understand accessing private practice counselling services can be a financial investment. We invite you to reassess your investment in counselling with me 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 and admin@peak-resilience.com 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 Laura Offenwanger?

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.

## 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 at Talking With Laura Counselling and Peak Resilience.

| | |
|---|---|
| Name of Client | Signature |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| Laura Offenwanger | Signature | Date |

Laura's Canadian Clinical Counsellor (CCC) number is #11247663

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://qsuite.google.com/faq/security

Jane App Guide: Basics- Security-FAQ

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

Jane App: Privacy

https://janeapp.com/privacy