

Data Protection & Confidentiality Policy

At Hope Therapy & Counselling Services, we take the privacy and security of your personal information seriously. We are committed to handling your data in accordance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018, and other relevant legislation.

This policy explains how we manage data protection both as an organisation and in relation to our affiliate counsellors. It covers what information is collected, how it is used, stored, and protected, and your rights regarding your personal data.

1. How Data Protection Works in Our Service

Hope Therapy & Counselling Services works with independent affiliate counsellors who provide therapy services. As such, data protection responsibilities are shared between Hope Therapy and the counsellors we work with.

- Hope Therapy & Counselling Services is responsible for processing initial enquiries, client referrals, and various administrative tasks such as invoicing and payment processing. We only collect and share the minimum necessary information required to facilitate your therapy sessions.
- Your counsellor is responsible for maintaining confidentiality and security regarding the content of your sessions and any session-related records they keep.

Both Hope Therapy & Counselling Services and our affiliate counsellors adhere to strict data protection standards to ensure your personal information is handled appropriately.

2. What Personal Data Do We Collect?

Hope Therapy & Counselling Services

When you enquire about or begin therapy with us, we collect and store personal data necessary for managing your therapy process. This may include:

- Your name, contact details (email, phone number, address, etc.)
- Basic details regarding your reason for seeking therapy (only as required to match you with a suitable counsellor)
- Payment records (but not your full payment details, as we use secure third-party payment processors)
- Correspondence between you and Hope Therapy & Counselling Services regarding your therapy

Your Counsellor

Once you begin therapy, your counsellor may collect additional information, which could include:

- Brief session notes (these are kept at the discretion of the counsellor and in line with their professional and legal requirements)
- Any relevant safeguarding or risk-related information (if necessary)
- Any information you provide that is necessary for therapeutic purposes

Hope Therapy & Counselling Services does not have access to the content of your sessions or your counsellor's records.

3. How Your Data is Stored and Protected

Hope Therapy & Counselling Services

We take appropriate technical and organisational measures to protect your data, including:

- Secure digital storage systems with controlled access

- Data encryption and password protection where necessary
- Restricted access to client information (only authorised personnel have access)

Your Counsellor

As independent practitioners, affiliate counsellors are responsible for securely storing their own client records. They must:

- Store session notes in accordance with professional guidelines (e.g., BACP, UKCP)
- Use secure systems to protect client data
- Maintain records only for as long as legally or ethically required

4. How Your Data is Used

Your data is used solely for the purpose of providing and administering therapy. Specifically, this means:

- Hope Therapy & Counselling Services will use your data to match you with a therapist, process payments, manage communication regarding your sessions and additional processes necessary to administer the client relationship.
- Your counsellor will use the data you provide in sessions to offer effective therapy tailored to your needs.
- Your information will never be shared with third parties for marketing or non-essential purposes.

5. Data Sharing and Confidentiality

We only share the minimum necessary information between Hope Therapy & Counselling Services and your counsellor. This means:

- Hope Therapy & Counselling Services passes your basic contact details and relevant therapy preferences to the counsellor.
- The counsellor does not share details of your sessions with Hope Therapy & Counselling Services.
- The counsellor may discuss matters relating to client work with an independent clinical supervisor in an anonymised manner. This is considered an ethical requirement and will be in accordance with strict ethical guidelines laid down by their professional body e.g. BACP, UKCP, NCPS etc
- The only exceptions where information may be shared beyond this are outlined in the Confidentiality & Safeguarding section below.

6. Confidentiality & Safeguarding – When Data May Be Shared

While we prioritise confidentiality, there are some circumstances where we or your counsellor may need to share information. These include:

Legal and Safeguarding Exceptions

Your counsellor may need to break confidentiality and share data if:

- You disclose a serious risk of harm to yourself or others.
- There is a legal requirement (e.g., disclosure of serious criminal activity, terrorism, child abuse, or a court order).
- There is a safeguarding concern involving a child or vulnerable adult.
- Where possible, your counsellor will discuss this with you before taking action. However, in urgent situations, they may need to act without prior consultation.

Data Shared with Hope Therapy & Counselling Services

In most cases, safeguarding concerns are handled independently by your counsellor. However, Hope Therapy & Counselling Services may provide oversight or support in safeguarding situations. This may include:

- Offering guidance to the counsellor.
- Assisting with procedural steps if external safeguarding bodies need to be involved.
- Keeping a record of safeguarding actions taken.

7. Your Rights Under Data Protection Law

Under UK GDPR, you have several rights concerning your personal data:

- Right to Access – You can request a copy of the data we or your counsellor hold about you.
- Right to Rectification – You can request corrections if any data we hold is inaccurate.
- Right to Erasure ('Right to be Forgotten') – In certain cases, you can request that we delete your personal data. However, some records may need to be kept for legal or professional reasons.
- Right to Restrict Processing – You can ask us to limit how we use your data.
- Right to Object – You can object to how your data is being processed under specific circumstances.
- Right to Data Portability – You can request that your data be transferred to another service provider where applicable.

If you wish to exercise any of these rights, you can contact us at [insert contact details] or discuss your rights with your counsellor directly.

8. How Long is Your Data Retained?

Hope Therapy & Counselling Services keeps limited client data (e.g., enquiry records, payments) for as long as necessary to fulfil legal and operational requirements.

Counsellors may retain session notes for a period recommended by their professional body (often up to 7 years for adult clients). You can ask your counsellor how long they keep records.

9. Questions or Concerns About Data Protection

If you have any concerns or questions about how your data is handled, you can:

- Contact Hope Therapy & Counselling Services at contact@hopefulminds.co.uk
- Speak directly to your counsellor about how they manage your data