



FIRST COUNSELING

BIBLICAL COUNSELING OF FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH JACKSONVILLE

COUNSELING ADVOCATE AGREEMENT

Welcome to First Counseling!

First Counseling, the counseling ministry of First Baptist Church, thanks you for your willingness to accompany your friend or family member through counseling during his or her time of need. We ask that you take the time to read and sign this important document that explains what you should know, expect, and agree to as a counselee advocate.

What You Can Expect from Us

What Is Biblical Counseling?

Biblical counseling can be condensed into these four basic commitments: the rendering of gracious care and hope, the acquiring of personal information with a biblical interpretation, biblical truth, and specific application. It is intensely practical and relies heavily on the comprehensive gathering of information for understanding (Proverbs 25:11, 13).

Biblical counseling is counsel based on God's Word as the ultimate source of truth and restoration for the believer in Christ. For the counselor, there is an operative conviction that God's Word is relevant to all of life and can be practically applied to every heart and every circumstance of difficulty. While this does not imply that Scripture is the only source of information in the counseling process, biblical counselors are consistent in their detailed biblical analysis of information and their overwhelming focus on the Bible, which alone is infallible, authoritative and sufficient truth for matters of eternal life and godliness (2 Timothy 3:16; Hebrews 4:12; 2 Peter 1:3ff)

Biblical counseling does not set aside real-life issues, but works to understand their origin, impact and involvement in the counselee's life from a biblical perspective. It acknowledges that the counselee possesses both physical and spiritual components that interact and affect one another because the counselee is a whole spiritual person (2 Corinthians 4:16-18). It seeks to hear and understand the counselee and apply the truth of Scripture (gospel truths, who God is, and all the biblical elements of change) to the counselee's life, so that through Jesus Christ there can be restoration where there is brokenness (Revelation 21:5). The biblical counselor will also often refer the counselee to get a medical check-up to see if there are physical complications involved in the issue at hand.

The biblical counselor strives to relate the counselees not to themselves to bring about healing, but to Jesus Christ and Truth that sets men free (Hebrews 4:14-16; John 8:32). In doing so, biblical counseling is dependent on the collaborative, supernatural resources that God has provided for change (the work of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God, the grace of Jesus Christ through the gospel, and the involvement of the local church). As the counselees contemplate and apply who God is and his Truth to their hearts and lives, they are over time transformed further into God's own image by the Holy Spirit's power (2 Corinthians 3:18; Philippians 2:12).

While behavioral change is important to this process of transformation, change within the counselee's heart (affections, thoughts, intentions) is essential as the counselor guides the counselee to a right understanding of God, his/her situation, and how Christians change. Through cultivating the counselee's faith, gospel motivation, and desire for God's glory with prayerful diligent work, real change from the inside out is possible.

This redemptive transformation that takes place as the counselee's heart interacts with the Word of God brings hope, encouragement, conviction, repentance, and/or healing. As individuals find Christ sufficient, put to death the things of the flesh, and strengthen the things of the Spirit, joy and peace become realities in their Christian walk (Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 3:10). The biblical counselor is humbly privileged to see God work and assist in this process of spiritual growth and freedom toward God's glory.

Biblical Counseling and Psychotropic Medication

While we hold to the sufficiency of Scripture for counseling problems, we know that many who will come to us will have been prescribed medications by a physician. The biblical teaching on the importance of the body affirms the use of medication for physical problems. As biblical counselors, we do not offer medical advice including advice on withdrawing from medications. Our care for counselees may lead us to ask questions about the side-effects of medication, or whether the counselees have allowed the medication to take the place of the Lord as a refuge in their life. We will always encourage counselees with questions regarding medications, or who wish to discontinue using medications, to seek the advice of competent medical professionals before changing or discontinuing any medication.

What We Expect from You

What Is Your Role in Counseling?

We are so thankful for your care for your friend/family member in joining him/her in counseling. In attending counseling as an advocate, our expectation is that you would follow the counselor's lead, but join the counselor in spurring your brother or sister on toward Christ-likeness (Hebrews 10:34-25). In counseling sessions and throughout the week(s) between, you are expected to actively love your brother or sister as Christ does, with a humble, engaged heart and a gentle spirit, bearing with him or her in word, deed and prayer (John 13:34-35; Ephesians 4:2; John 17:20-21). Please only participate if the counselor asks you to do so.

In sessions you will most likely be privy to very personal information, often regarding sin in the counselee's life. As part of honoring God and loving the counselee well, it is incredibly important that all information shared with you in counseling remain confidential. Should an issue concerning safety arise, the counselor will address potential recourse based on the confidentiality limitations that will follow in this document. As an advocate, you will be expected to exhibit Christ-like character in your communication throughout and following the counseling process—letting no communication that is unwholesome/destructive come from your mouth, but only that which is good for building up your brother or sister (Ephesians 4: 29-31).

As long as you have agreed to fulfill the role of advocate for the counselee, you are expected to consistently attend sessions with the counselee in such a way that the counselee's care is your priority. If the counselor assigns counselee homework that you are also asked to complete, you are expected to do so in a way that contributes to the counseling process. Please be on time for sessions and be prepared to fully engage to best serve your friend or family member, as well as the counselor seeking to help him or her. Should you ever be unable to attend a counseling session, it will fall to the counselor to decide whether to proceed with the session without you. In many cases, the counselor may choose not to hold sessions without an advocate present. This is to restate the fact that your consistent participation is extremely important to the counselee's care. Please see it as such before agreeing to be an advocate.

While some counselors may bring you into the sessions in a more involved way than others, the aforementioned expectations of your participation are consistent for all counseling at First Counseling.

Materials Needed for Counseling Sessions

1. Bible, notebook, pen/pencil
2. Any assigned homework (if you also were asked to participate)
3. A humble, loving spirit that seeks your brother/sister's good

Confidentiality – Confidentiality is an important aspect of the counseling process, and we will carefully guard the information counselees entrust to us. There are situations, however, in which the counselors may believe that it is wise or mandated (biblically or legally) for them to share certain information with others. It is not possible to list every possible circumstance, but some examples would include:

1. When a counselor is uncertain how to address a problem and needs to seek advice from another pastor or counselor.
2. When there is concern that someone may be harmed unless others intervene.
3. When abuse or another crime must be reported to the authorities.
4. When a person refuses to renounce a particular sin and it becomes necessary to seek the assistance of others in the church to encourage repentance and reconciliation or to begin the process of church discipline (Proverbs 15:22, 24:11; Matthew 18:15-20).
5. When observers sit in on counseling sessions to assist the counselor or for training purposes (including audio & video recordings—only with permission).
6. When the counselee’s pastor, staff and/or church leadership is needed to provide pastoral assistance.
7. When the counselor is legally required to provide information or testimony in a legal proceeding.

Please be assured that our counselors strongly prefer not to disclose personal information to others, and they will make every effort to help the counselee find ways to resolve a problem as privately as possible.

Legal Release

Your signature below serves as acknowledgement that you have read and understand the information contained in this document. As one accompanying a person receiving counseling, I understand the following:

1. I agree to observe biblical counseling knowing what it is and is not.
2. I understand First Counseling’s counselor is not a licensed psychologist, mental health counselor, or health care provider; does not adhere to the typical theories and models of traditional “psychology”; and is not constrained by the ethical guidelines associated with a state or national license.
3. I understand that the counselee has the ability to choose other forms of care offered outside of First Counseling
4. I understand that the counselee has expressly waived any and all legal rights regarding confidentiality (including the requirement that no information can be released without his/her written authorization) in favor of First Counseling’s limits of confidentiality.
5. Subject to the provisions of this advocate agreement form (including confidentiality), I am free to end my advocacy sessions at any time.
6. The assigned First Counseling counselor is free to end the counseling sessions at any time.
7. I hereby acknowledge that I have had the opportunity to seek the advice of independent legal counsel and that I have read and understood all of the terms and provisions of this Agreement.

I expressly waive the right to sue the assigned counselor, First Counseling, its staff, or anyone else connected with the ministry in a court of law—this waiver will be binding on all family members, heirs, legal guardians, attorneys, etc. who might take action in connection with or on behalf of the person being care for.

Resolution of Conflicts (Arbitration) – On rare occasions a conflict may develop between a counselor and a counselee. In order to make sure that any such conflicts will be resolved in a biblically faithful manner, we require all of our counselees and their advocates to agree that any dispute that arises with a counselor, First Counseling, or our certifying agencies, as a result of counseling will be settled by mediation and, if necessary, legally binding arbitration in accordance with the Rules of Procedure of the Institute for Christian Conciliation (www.aorhope.org/icc-rules); judgment upon an arbitration award may be entered in any court having jurisdiction. It is expressly understood that by agreeing in advance to arbitrate that the counselee is giving up his right to a trial in the civil courts.

Counselee's Name (print): _____

Advocate Name (print): _____ **Phone** _____

Advocate Signature: _____ **Date** _____