

Tamara Axtell Counseling, PLLC DBA
New Leaf Counseling Associates 10 NE
Creelman Ln, Suite B Belfair, WA 98528
425-429-7673

Newleafcounselingassociates.com

Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)

NOTICE OF PRIVACY PRACTICES

THIS NOTICE DESCRIBES HOW MEDICAL INFORMATION ABOUT YOU MAY BE USED AND DISCLOSED AND HOW YOU CAN GET ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION. PLEASE REVIEW IT CAREFULLY

I. COMMITMENT TO YOUR PRIVACY:

Tamara Axtell Counseling, PLLC, DBA New Leaf Counseling Associates (henceforth referred to as “This Practice”) is dedicated to maintaining the privacy of your protected health information (PHI) and electronic protected health information (ePHI) (henceforth condensed and referred to as simply PHI). PHI is information that may identify you and that relates to your past, present, or future physical or mental health condition and related health care services, either in paper or electronic format. This Notice of Privacy Practices (“Notice”) is required by law to provide you with the legal duties and the privacy practices that This Practice maintains concerning your PHI. It also describes how medical and mental health information may be used and disclosed, as well as your rights

regarding your PHI. Please read carefully and discuss any questions or concerns with your therapist.

II. LEGAL DUTY TO SAFEGUARD YOUR

PHI: By federal and state law, this Practice is required to ensure that your PHI is kept private. This Notice explains when, why, and how This Practice would use and/or disclose your PHI. Use of PHI means when This Practice shares, applies, utilizes, examines, or analyzes information within its practice; PHI is disclosed when This Practice releases, transfers, gives, or otherwise reveals it to a third party outside of This Practice. With some exceptions, this Practice may not use or disclose more of your PHI than is necessary to accomplish the purpose for which the use or disclosure is made; however, this Practice is always legally required to follow the privacy practices described in this Notice.

III. CHANGES TO THIS NOTICE: The terms of this notice apply to all records containing your PHI that are created or retained by This Practice. Please note that this Practice reserves the right to revise or amend this Notice of Privacy Practices. Any revision or amendment will be effective for all of your records that This Practice has created or maintained in the past and for any of your records that This Practice may create or maintain in the future. This Practice will have a copy of the current Notice available in a visible location or on our website at all times, and you may request a copy of the most current Notice at any time. The date of the latest revision will always be listed at the end of this Practice’s Notice of Privacy Practices.

IV. HOW This Practice MAY USE AND DISCLOSE YOUR PHI: This Practice will not use or disclose your PHI without your written authorization, except as described in this Notice or as described in the “Information, Authorization and Consent to Treatment” document. Below, you will find the various categories of possible uses and disclosures, along with some examples.

1. For Treatment: This Practice may disclose your PHI to physicians, psychiatrists, psychologists, and other licensed healthcare providers who provide you with healthcare services or are otherwise involved in your care. Example: If you are also seeing a psychiatrist for medication management, this Practice may disclose your PHI to her/him in order to coordinate your care. Except for in an emergency, This Practice will always ask for your authorization in writing prior to any such consultation.

2. For Health Care Operations: This Practice may disclose your PHI to facilitate the efficient and correct operation of its practice, improve your care, and contact you when necessary. Example: We use your health information to manage your treatment and services.

3. To Obtain Payment for Treatment: This Practice may use and disclose your PHI to bill and collect payment for the treatment and services This Practice provided to you. Example: This practice may send your PHI to your insurance company or managed healthcare plan to obtain payment for the healthcare services provided to you. This Practice could also provide your PHI to billing companies, claims processing companies, and others that process health care claims for This Practice’s office if either you or your insurance carrier is not able to stay current with your account. In this latter instance, This Practice will always do

its best to reconcile this with you first, prior to involving any outside agency.

4. Employees and Business Associates: There may be instances where services are provided to This Practice by an employee or through contracts with third-party “business associates.” Whenever an employee or business associate arrangement involves the use or disclosure of your PHI, this Practice will have a written contract that requires the employee or business associate to maintain the same high standards of safeguarding your privacy that are required of this Practice.

Note: Federal law provides additional protection for certain types of health information, including **alcohol or drug abuse, mental health, and AIDS/HIV**, and may limit whether and how This Practice may disclose information about you to others.

V. USE AND DISCLOSURE OF YOUR PHI IN CERTAIN SPECIAL CIRCUMSTANCES

- This Practice may use and/or disclose your PHI without your consent or authorization for the following reasons:

1. Law Enforcement:

We follow all laws regarding the protection and disclosure of your PHI. In limited circumstances, we may be required to share information. For example, to comply with a court order, respond to a legally authorized subpoena. We release only the information necessary to meet these legal obligations. We will **not** share your records with government or law enforcement agencies for general monitoring, immigration, or political purposes.

2. Lawsuits and Disputes: This Practice may disclose information about you to respond to a lawsuit or a search warrant. This Practice may also disclose information if an

arbitrator or arbitration panel compels disclosure, when arbitration is lawfully requested by either party, pursuant to subpoena *duces tecum* (e.g., a subpoena for mental health records) or any other provision authorizing disclosure in a proceeding before an arbitrator or arbitration panel. This Practice will only do this if efforts have been made to tell you about the request and you have been provided an opportunity to object or to obtain an appropriate attorney to quash the subpoena or court order protecting the information requested.

- 3. Public Health Risks:** This Practice may disclose your PHI to public health or legal authorities charged with preventing or controlling disease, injury, or disability, to report births and deaths, and to notify persons who may have been exposed to a disease or at risk for getting or spreading a disease or condition.
- 4. Serious Threat to Health or Safety:** This Practice may disclose your PHI if you are in such mental or emotional condition as to be dangerous to yourself or the person or property of others and if This Practice determines in good faith that disclosure is necessary to prevent the threatened danger. Under these circumstances, this Practice may provide PHI to law enforcement personnel or other persons able to prevent or mitigate such a serious threat to the health or safety of a person or the public.
- 5. Minors:** If you are a minor under 13 years of age in the state of Washington, this Practice may be compelled to release certain types of information to your parents or guardian in accordance with applicable law.

- 6. Abuse and Neglect:** This Practice may disclose PHI if mandated by local child, elder, or dependent adult abuse and neglect reporting laws. Example: If This Practice has a reasonable suspicion of child abuse or neglect, This Practice will report this to the appropriate authorities.
- 7. Coroners, Medical Examiners, and Funeral Directors:** This Practice may release PHI about you to a coroner or medical examiner. This may be necessary, for example, to identify a deceased person, determine the cause of death, or perform other duties as authorized by law. This Practice may also disclose PHI to funeral directors, consistent with applicable law, to carry out their duties.
- 8. Communications with Family, Friends, or Others:** This Practice may release your PHI to the person you named in your Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care (if you have one), to a friend or family member who is your personal representative (i.e., empowered under or other law to make health-related decisions for you), or any other person you identify, relevant to that person’s involvement in your care or payment related to your care. In addition, This Practice may disclose your PHI to an entity assisting in disaster relief efforts so that your family can be notified about your condition.
- 9. Military and Veterans:** If you are a member of the armed forces, this Practice may release PHI about you as required by military command authorities. This Practice may also release PHI about foreign military personnel to the appropriate military authority.

10. National Security, Protective Services for the President, and Intelligence Activities:

This Practice may release PHI about you to authorized federal officials so they may provide protection to the President, other authorized persons, or foreign heads of state to conduct special investigations for intelligence, counterintelligence, and other national activities authorized by law.

11. Correctional Institutions: If you are or become an inmate of a correctional institution, this Practice may disclose PHI to the institution or its agents when necessary for your health or the health and safety of others.

12. For Research Purposes: In certain limited circumstances, this Practice may use information you have provided for medical/psychological research, but only with your written authorization. The only circumstance where written authorization would not be required would be if the information you have provided could be completely disguised in such a manner that you could not be identified directly or through any identifiers linked to you. The research would also need to be approved by an institutional review board that has examined the research proposal and ascertained that the established protocols have been met to ensure the privacy of your information.

13. For Workers' Compensation Purposes: This Practice may provide PHI in order to comply with Workers' Compensation or similar programs established by law.

14. Appointment Reminders: This Practice is permitted to contact you, without your prior authorization, to provide appointment reminders or information about alternative or other health-related benefits and services

that you may need or that may be of interest to you.

15. Health Oversight Activities: This Practice may disclose health information to a health oversight agency for activities such as audits, investigations, inspections, or licensure of facilities. These activities are necessary for compliance with laws. This Practice's compliance with HIPAA regulations.

16. If Disclosure is Otherwise Specifically Required by Law.

17. Sharing Your Information for Marketing or Fundraising: This Practice will never approach you about fundraising or marketing because it is unethical in our profession.

18. VI. Other Uses and Disclosures Require Your Prior Written Authorization: In any other situation not covered by this notice, this Practice will ask for your written authorization before using or disclosing medical information about you. If you choose to authorize use or disclosure, you can later revoke that authorization by notifying This Practice in writing of your decision. You understand that This Practice is unable to take back any disclosures it has already made with your permission, This Practice will continue to comply with laws that require certain disclosures, and This Practice is required to retain records of the care that its therapists have provided to you.

VII. RIGHTS YOU HAVE REGARDING YOUR PHI:

1. The Right to See and Get Copies of Your PHI either in paper or electronic format: In general, you have the right to see your PHI that is in This Practice's possession or to get copies of it. You will also be allowed to inspect your PHI in person and take notes or photographs of

your PHI. However, you must request the above in writing. If This Practice does not have your PHI but knows who does, you will be advised on how to obtain it. You will receive a response from This Practice within 15 days of receiving your written request. Under certain circumstances, this Practice may feel it must deny your request, but if it does, this Practice will give you, in writing, the reasons for the denial. This Practice will also explain your right to have its denial reviewed. If you request copies of your PHI, you will be charged a reasonable fee per page, as well as the associated costs for supplies and postage. This Practice may see fit to provide you with a summary or explanation of the PHI, but only if you agree to it, as well as to the cost, in advance.

2. The Right to Request Limits on Uses and Disclosures of Your PHI: You have the right to ask that This Practice limit how it uses and discloses your PHI. While This Practice will consider your request, it is not legally bound to agree. If This Practice agrees to your request, it will put those limits in writing and abide by them except in emergency situations. If you pay for a service or healthcare item out-of-pocket in full, you can request that we not share that information for payment or our operations with your health insurer. You do not have the right to limit the uses and disclosures that This Practice is legally required or permitted to make.

3. The Right to Choose How This Practice Sends Your PHI to You: It is your right to ask that your PHI be sent to you at an alternate address (for example, sending information to your work address rather than your home address) or by an alternate method (for example, via email instead of by regular mail). This Practice is obliged to agree to your request, providing that it can give you the PHI, in the

format you requested, without undue inconvenience.

4. The Right to Get a List of Disclosures. You are entitled to a list of disclosures of your PHI that This Practice has made. The list will not include uses or disclosures to which you have specifically authorized (i.e., those for treatment, payment, or health care operations, sent directly to you or to your family; neither will the list include disclosures made for national security purposes or to corrections or law enforcement personnel. The request must be in writing and specify the desired time period for the accounting, which must be less than a 6-year period and commence after April 14, 2003.

This Practice will respond to your request for an accounting of disclosures within 60 days of receiving your request. The list will include the date of the disclosure, the recipient of the disclosure (including address, if known), a description of the information disclosed, and the reason for the disclosure. This Practice will provide the list to you at no cost unless you make more than one request in the same year, in which case it will charge you a reasonable sum based on a set fee for each additional request.

5. The Right to Choose Someone to Act for You: If you have given someone medical power of attorney or if someone is your legal guardian, that person can exercise your rights and make choices about your health information. We will ensure that the person has the necessary authority and can act on your behalf before taking any action.

6. The Right to Amend Your PHI: If you believe that there is some error in your PHI or that important information has been omitted, it is your right to request that This Practice correct the existing information or add the missing information. Your request, along with the reason for it, must be made in writing. You will receive

a response within 60 days of this Practice receipt of your request. This Practice may deny your request, in writing, if it finds that the PHI is: (a) correct and complete, (b) forbidden to be disclosed, (c) not part of its records, or (d) written by someone other than This Practice. Denial must be in writing and must state the reasons for the denial. It must also explain your right to file a written statement objecting to the denial. If you do not file a written objection, you still have the right to ask that your request and This Practice denial be attached to any future disclosures of your PHI. If This Practice approves your request, it will make the change(s) to your PHI. Additionally, This Practice will tell you that the changes have been made and will advise all others who need to know about the change(s) to your PHI.

6. The Right to Get This Notice by Email: You have the right to get this notice by email. You also have the right to request a paper copy of it.

7. Submit all Written Requests: Submit to this Practice's Director and Privacy Officer, Tamara Axtell, at the address listed on top of page one of this document.

VIII. COMPLAINTS: If you are concerned your privacy rights may have been violated, or if you object to a decision this Practice made about access to your PHI, you are entitled to file a complaint. You may also send a written complaint to the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services Office of Civil Rights. This Practice will provide you with the address. Under no circumstances will you be penalized or retaliated against for filing a complaint.

Please discuss any questions or concerns with your therapist. Your signature on the "Information, Authorization, and Consent to Treatment" (provided to you separately)

indicates that you have read and understood this document.

IX. This Practice Responsibilities: We are required by law to maintain the privacy and security of your PHI. We will let you know promptly if a breach occurs that may have compromised the privacy or security of your information. We must follow the duties and privacy practices described in this notice and give you a copy of it. We will not use or share your information, except as described here, unless you provide us with written consent. If you tell us we can, you may change your mind at any time. Let us know in writing if you change your mind.

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