

Strong as Stone Counseling Services, PLLC

Strong as Stone Counseling Practice Policies

1. Practice Policies and Informed Consent for Services

Office Hours & Contact: Office hours may vary by clinician and location. Administrative support is generally available during normal business hours unless otherwise posted.

Appointments: Sessions are typically scheduled in advance and may be offered in person or via telehealth, depending on clinical appropriateness, licensure requirements, and availability. Standard counseling sessions are generally 53 minutes for a full session (1-hour) and approximately 25–30 minutes for a half session, if offered.

Scheduling and Communication: Appointments, cancellations, and routine administrative matters should be handled through the main office, support staff, or approved practice systems. Communication through personal cell phone numbers, personal email addresses, or personal social media accounts is not appropriate for clinical care.

Appointment Reminders: Reminder texts, emails, or calls may be provided as a courtesy. However, clients remain responsible for keeping track of scheduled appointments, even if a reminder is not received.

Cancellation, Late Arrival, and Attendance Policy: Because appointment times are reserved specifically for each client, missed appointments and late cancellations affect both the clinician and other clients who may need services.

- If you are unable to keep your appointment, you must notify the office **24 hours in advance**.
- Without 24-hour notice, SAS will charge you the full cost of your session. Insurance does not pay for missed appointment fees, and these charges are the client's responsibility.
- If you are more than 15 minutes late to your 1-hour appointment (7 minutes late for a 30–45-minute appointment), you will be charged the full cost of your session, and your appointment will be rescheduled.
- Repeated no-shows, frequent late cancellations, or ongoing attendance issues may result in a discussion about whether SAS is the appropriate level of care or whether services should be paused, modified, or referred elsewhere.

2. Emergency and Crisis Policy

SAS is not a 24-hour crisis service and does not provide emergency response.

- If you are experiencing an emergency, are at immediate risk of harm, or believe someone else is in immediate danger, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room immediately.
- If you are in emotional distress or experiencing a mental health crisis, you may call or text 988, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, which is available 24/7.
- Routine messages left for SAS are not monitored at all times and should not be used for urgent or emergency communication.
- For telehealth clients, SAS may request your physical location and an emergency contact at the beginning of a session in case emergency intervention becomes necessary.
- For routine, non-emergency clinical matters, please leave a detailed, confidential voicemail at (903) 500-2005. Messages will be returned as soon as possible. We cannot ensure the confidentiality of emails for clinical content.



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3. Confidentiality and Its Limits

Your counseling information is private and will be handled in accordance with applicable federal and Texas law. Texas law provides special confidentiality protections for mental health records and communications, with disclosure allowed only in specific circumstances.

In general, SAS will not release your information without your written authorization unless disclosure is permitted or required by law.

Examples of situations in which confidentiality may be limited include:

- When there is concern about serious risk of harm to yourself or another person;
- Suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a child, elderly person, or disabled person;
- A valid court order, subpoena, or other lawful process, when applicable;
- Certain health care operations, billing, audits, or insurance-related functions permitted by law;
- When disclosure is otherwise required or authorized by Texas or federal law.

When disclosure is necessary, SAS will make reasonable efforts to limit disclosure to the minimum necessary information when appropriate.

Practice Consultation

- To support quality of care, clinicians within SAS may consult with one another, supervisors, or appropriate professional consultants as permitted by law and ethics. If your clinician is under supervision, that supervision relationship and required disclosures should be explained to you as part of informed consent. Texas LPC rules specifically require informed consent to address supervision where applicable.

Insurance and Third-Party Payors

- If you use insurance, employee assistance benefits, or another third-party payor, SAS may need to disclose limited information necessary for billing, claims processing, utilization review, or other payment/health care operations. Once information is released to an insurer or other payer, SAS cannot control how that entity uses or stores the information.

5. Communication Policy

SAS uses phone, secure electronic systems, and other approved practice tools for scheduling and limited administrative communication.

Administrative Communication: SAS may contact you by phone, voicemail, email, or secure portal for matters such as scheduling, reminders, paperwork, billing, or routine follow-up, unless you request otherwise and SAS is able to accommodate that request.

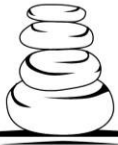
Clinical Communication: Email and portal messages are generally not appropriate for urgent matters or for conducting therapy. Sensitive or lengthy clinical concerns should be addressed in session or through secure, approved systems when available.

Voicemail and Text Risks: Although SAS takes reasonable precautions, electronic communication carries privacy risks. By providing your contact information, you acknowledge those risks for routine practice communication.

6. Professional Relationship and Boundaries

The counseling relationship is professional in nature and is intended to support your treatment goals.

SAS clinicians will maintain appropriate therapeutic boundaries and will not enter exploitative, romantic, sexual, or otherwise inappropriate relationships with clients. Texas ethics rules require counselors to maintain professional boundaries and prohibit sexual exploitation and therapeutic deception.



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Social Media and Online Boundaries:

To protect your privacy and the integrity of the therapeutic relationship:

- SAS clinicians do not accept friend/follow/contact requests from current clients on personal social media;
- Clinicians do not use personal social media to communicate with clients about treatment;
- SAS may maintain professional business pages or websites for informational purposes, but interaction through those platforms is not a substitute for clinical care.

Public Encounters: If a clinician sees you in public, the clinician may not initiate contact in order to protect your confidentiality. You are welcome to greet your clinician, but you are never expected to do so.

7. Nature of Counseling Services

Risks, Benefits, and Expectations: Counseling can help clients better understand themselves, improve coping, strengthen relationships, process trauma, reduce distress, and make meaningful life changes. Benefits vary from person to person, and no specific outcome can be guaranteed. Counseling also involves potential risks. You may experience difficult emotions, recall painful experiences, feel temporarily worse before feeling better, or face stress related to making personal changes. Effective therapy requires participation from both the client and the clinician. Progress may depend on many factors, including attendance, honesty, readiness for change, outside stressors, and clinical fit. Treatment goals and approaches may be reviewed periodically and adjusted as clinically appropriate.

8. Client Rights, Referrals, and Ending Services: You have the right to ask questions about treatment, participate in planning your care, and discontinue counseling at any time, subject to payment for services already provided. SAS may recommend referral, transition, or termination of services when clinically appropriate, including situations such as:

- The client's needs fall outside the clinician's scope of competence;
- The client would benefit from a higher level of care or another type of service;
- Nonpayment or repeated attendance problems interfere with care;
- Safety concerns, threats, harassment, or boundary violations occur;
- The client is impaired during sessions in a way that prevents safe treatment

When possible and clinically appropriate, SAS will discuss alternatives and provide referral options. However, SAS cannot guarantee acceptance by another provider or program.

9. Policy for Minor Clients

In most cases, a parent or legal guardian must consent for treatment of a minor. Texas law recognizes some exceptions in which a minor may consent to certain care, including some counseling related to suicide prevention, substance use, or abuse.

Initial Appointment and Legal Authority: A parent, managing conservator, legal guardian, or other legally authorized person must complete intake paperwork and provide any relevant custody, conservatorship, guardianship, or authorization documents before services begin.

Children in the Office: Children may not be left unattended in vehicles, waiting areas, hallways, restrooms, or outside the office. SAS does not provide childcare.

Divorced/Separated Parents: If parents are divorced or separated, SAS may require a copy of the court order or custody paperwork before treatment begins. Access rights, consent authority, and communication rights may depend on the language of the court order. In Texas, both parents may have access to a child's records unless limited by court order.

Parent Involvement: For minor clients, SAS will balance the child's privacy with the parent/guardian's legal rights and the child's clinical needs. Parents/guardians may be involved in treatment as clinically appropriate, but minor clients may also need a degree of therapeutic privacy to benefit from counseling.



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10. Service Delivery Methods

- Telehealth Services

SAS may offer telehealth when clinically appropriate and legally permitted. Texas law requires informed consent for telehealth services. Potential benefits of telehealth include convenience, improved access, and continuity of care. Potential risks include technology failures, reduced privacy, interruptions, and limitations in responding to emergencies remotely.

By participating in telehealth, you understand and agree that:

- Your clinician may verify your identity, physical location, and emergency contact information;
- You will attend from a location that supports privacy and safety when possible;
- You will not participate while driving or in another unsafe situation;
- Telehealth is not appropriate for emergencies;
- Technology problems may require rescheduling or switching to another format if clinically appropriate.

If telehealth is not clinically appropriate, not allowed by licensure rules, or not workable due to technology or privacy concerns, SAS may require in-person care or referral.

- AI-Assisted Documentation Policy

SAS may use secure technology tools, including AI-assisted documentation tools, to support administrative efficiency and improve note drafting, where permitted and clinically appropriate. The purpose of these tools is administrative support only.

If such a tool is used:

- The clinician remains fully responsible for reviewing, editing, and approving the final clinical note;
- The tool does not replace clinical judgment, diagnosis, or treatment planning;
- Only appropriate, practice-approved technology vendors should be used;
- Clients may ask questions about this process and, when applicable, may decline participation if SAS offers that option.

Only the finalized clinical record approved by the clinician becomes part of the medical record. SAS should ensure that any technology use remains consistent with privacy obligations, payer rules, and practice policy.

- Recording Policy

- To protect privacy and maintain the integrity of treatment, SAS prohibits unauthorized audio, video, or photographic recording of sessions or of any private area of the practice.
- This includes therapy rooms, waiting areas, hallways, restrooms, telehealth sessions, and other practice spaces.
- If a client wishes to request an exception, it must be discussed in advance, and any approval must be in writing. SAS reserves the right to deny such requests.
- SAS clinicians will not record sessions for training, consultation, or other purposes without separate, informed written consent.
- Unauthorized recording may result in termination of services when clinically and ethically appropriate.



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11. Fees, Payment, Insurance, and Financial Responsibility

Payment: Clients are responsible for understanding the cost of services and for paying all applicable charges. Payment is due at the time of service unless other arrangements have been made in advance.

Insurance Filing:

If SAS files insurance as a courtesy, the client remains financially responsible for deductibles, copays, coinsurance, noncovered services, denied claims, and any balance owed. **INSURANCE VERIFICATION IS NOT A GUARANTEE OF PAYMENT.**

Credit Card on File: SAS requires a valid payment method on file for copays, coinsurance, self-pay fees, late cancellation/no-show fees, and outstanding balances, in accordance with signed financial consent.

Past-Due Balances: If a balance remains unpaid, SAS may pause scheduling of future non-emergency appointments and may use lawful collection processes if necessary. Any such action would be limited to information reasonably necessary for collection.

A. Good Faith Estimates

Under federal law, uninsured and self-pay clients who schedule services or request cost information are entitled to receive a Good Faith Estimate of expected charges. A Good Faith Estimate is an estimate only and is not a contract. Actual charges may differ based on your treatment needs, frequency of sessions, changes in services, or other circumstances. Clients may ask for a Good Faith Estimate before starting services or at any time during treatment if they are uninsured or choosing not to use insurance for a service.

B. Fees and Policies Regarding Records Requests

SAS will provide copies of records in accordance with applicable Texas and federal law.

Fees for records, summaries, or related services will be charged in compliance **with the maximum amounts permitted by Texas law**, which may include:

- A base fee,
- A per-page fee,
- Reasonable labor or administrative costs,
- Certification or affidavit fees when requested, and
- Actual costs of mailing or secure delivery.

Clients will be informed of any applicable charges prior to fulfillment of the request when required. SAS reserves the right to provide a summary of records when clinically appropriate or permitted by law.

C. Court, Legal, and Forensic Matters

Counseling services are not the same as forensic, custody, or expert evaluation services. Unless explicitly agreed in writing, SAS clinicians do not provide custody recommendations, forensic opinions, or expert witness services. Involvement in legal matters can affect the therapeutic relationship and may not be clinically appropriate. If a clinician is subpoenaed, asked to produce records, required to communicate with attorneys, or otherwise involved in legal proceedings, the client may be responsible for fees associated with preparation, consultation, copying, travel, testimony, and time reserved, to the extent allowed by law and disclosed in SAS's financial policy.



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12. Non-Discrimination and Scope of Practice

SAS provides services without unlawful discrimination. SAS does not discriminate on the basis of race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, or physical disability. SAS also reserves the right to refer clients elsewhere when a requested service falls outside a clinician's competence, licensure, availability, or scope of practice, or when another provider or setting would better meet the client's needs.

13. Acknowledgement and Consent

Agreement and Signature: I acknowledge that I have received and reviewed the Strong as Stone Counseling Practice Policies and Informed Consent for Services. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and understand that I may request clarification at any time. I understand that these policies apply to services provided by SAS and may be updated as needed to remain consistent with clinical, ethical, or legal requirements.

Client Name

Client Signature OR Parent/Guardian Signature (if client is a minor) Date