

# Psychiatric Counseling Checklist

## 1. Room & Privacy

- Private, quiet room
  - Door closed but **unlocked**
  - No interruptions (phones, staff, noise)
  - Adequate lighting and ventilation
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## 2. Seating Arrangement

- Counselor and patient seated **face-to-face at an angle**
  - Distance **1–1.5 meters (3–5 feet)**
  - Same eye level
  - Comfortable chairs
  - No large desk or barrier between counselor and patient
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## 3. Safety

- Counselor seated **closer to the door**
  - Clear exit path
  - No sharp or dangerous objects in room
  - Furniture stable and non-movable
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## 4. Who Is Present

- Patient
  - Mental health professional only
  - Family member/interpreter present **only with patient consent**
  - No unnecessary staff in the room
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## 5. Professional Conduct

- Explain confidentiality and its limits
- Obtain consent before starting

- Maintain respectful distance and body language
- Non-judgmental and calm approach

### The Limits of Confidentiality

This is the critical part. Confidentiality is **not absolute**. Counselors are legally and ethically required to break it in specific situations:

Situation	Reason
<b>Risk of suicide or self-harm</b>	Duty to protect the client from themselves
<b>Risk of harming another person</b>	Duty to warn/protect third parties (Tarasoff principle)
<b>Child abuse or neglect</b>	Mandatory reporting laws in most jurisdictions
<b>Elder or vulnerable adult abuse</b>	Similar mandatory reporting obligations
<b>Court order or subpoena</b>	Legal system can compel disclosure
<b>Danger to public health</b>	e.g., certain communicable diseases
<b>Supervision or consultation</b>	Notes may be discussed with supervisors (client should know this)
<b>Insurance/billing</b>	Some session information shared with insurers

### The Story of the Tarasoff Principle

#### The Tragic Events

In **1968**, at the University of California, Berkeley, a graduate student named **Prosenjit Poddar** fell deeply in love with a fellow student named **Tatiana Tarasoff**. She did not share his feelings and made it clear she was not interested in a romantic relationship with him.

Poddar became **obsessed and deeply disturbed** by her rejection. His mental state deteriorated significantly, and he began to express increasingly dangerous thoughts about Tatiana.

## The Counseling Sessions

Poddar sought help and began seeing a campus psychologist, **Dr. Lawrence Moore**, at the university's student health center.

During their sessions, Poddar **explicitly told his therapist that he intended to kill Tatiana Tarasoff** when she returned from a trip to Brazil.

Dr. Moore took the threat seriously and:

- Wrote a letter to campus police recommending Poddar be detained
- Campus police briefly detained Poddar but released him, believing he seemed rational
- Dr. Moore's supervisor then **ordered the letter destroyed** and the case dropped, deciding Poddar was not dangerous

**Tatiana was never warned.**

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## The Murder

In **October 1969**, when Tatiana returned from Brazil, Poddar went to her home.

- She refused to let him in
  - He shot her with a pellet gun
  - When she ran outside, he chased her and **stabbed her to death**
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## The Lawsuit

Tatiana's parents, **Vitaly and Lydia Tarasoff**, sued the University of California, arguing that:

The therapist **knew** their daughter was in danger and **did nothing** to warn her or them.

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## The Landmark Court Ruling (1976)

The California Supreme Court ruled in **Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California** and established one of the most important legal principles in mental health history:

*"The protective privilege ends where the public peril begins."*

The court ruled that mental health professionals have a **legal duty to protect identifiable third parties** from serious threats made by their clients. This duty could be fulfilled by:

- **Warning the intended victim** directly
- Notifying **law enforcement**
- Taking other reasonable steps to protect the person at risk

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## What Changed After Tarasoff

The ruling fundamentally transformed counseling and psychology practice across the world:

Before Tarasoff	After Tarasoff
<b>Confidentiality was treated as nearly absolute</b>	Confidentiality has clear, enforceable limits
<b>Therapists had little legal obligation to warn others</b>	Therapists have a <b>Duty to Warn and Duty to Protect</b>
<b>Protecting the client was the only focus</b>	Protecting <b>potential victims</b> became equally important
<b>Breaking confidentiality was seen as unethical</b>	Breaking it in danger situations became <b>ethically required</b>



## 6. Telepsychiatry (if applicable)

- Patient in a private room
- Secure platform used
- Headphones encouraged
- Emergency contact available

