

## **Informed Consent**

Welcome! This document contains important information about my professional services and business policies. Please read it carefully and make note of any questions you might have so we can discuss them at our next meeting. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between us.

### ***Psychological Services***

Psychotherapy varies depending on the personalities of the therapist and client, and the particular problem you bring forward. There are many different methods I may use to explore the problems that you hope to address. Psychotherapy requires an active participation for you to work on things we discuss both during our sessions and at home.

Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. On the other hand, psychotherapy has also been shown to have benefits for people who go through it. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. But there are no guarantees of what you will experience.

Our first session will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, I will be able to offer you some first impressions, what work will include, and a treatment plan to follow, if you decide to continue therapy. You should evaluate this information along with your own opinions of whether you feel comfortable working with me. Therapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should be very careful about the therapist you select. If you have questions about my procedures, we should discuss them whenever they arise. If your doubts persist, I will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.

### ***Meetings***

I typically conduct an evaluation that will last from 2-4 sessions. During this time, we can decide if I am the best person to provide the services you need in order to meet your treatment goals. If psychotherapy has begun, I will usually schedule one 60 minute session (one appointment hour of 60 minutes duration) per week at an agreed upon time. Once an appointment hour has been scheduled, you will be expected to pay for the session unless you provide 24 hour advance notice cancellation unless we both agree that you were unable to attend due to circumstances beyond your control. If it is possible, I will try to find another time to reschedule the appointment.

### ***Professional Fee***

My hourly fee is \$100. Additionally, to weekly appointments, I charge this amount for other professional services you may need, though I will break down the hourly cost if I work for periods of less than one hour. Other services include report writing, telephone conversations lasting longer than 15 minutes, attendance at meetings with other professionals you have authorized, preparation of records or treatment summaries, and the time spent performing any other service you may request of me. If you become involved in legal proceedings that require my participation, you will be expected to pay for my professional time even if I am called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement, I charge \$300 per hour for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding.

### ***Billing and Payments***

You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to when they are requested. In circumstances of unusual financial hardship, I may negotiate a fee adjustment for payment installment plans.

If your account has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements for payment have not been agreed upon, I have the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may involve hiring a collection agency or going through small claims court. If such legal action is necessary, its costs will be included in the claim. In most collection situations, the only information I release regarding a client's treatment is his/her name, the nature of the services provided, and the amount due. It is my legal right to disclose this information in the event that I need to collect overdue payment.

### ***Insurance Reimbursement***

In order for us to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate what resources you have available to pay for your treatment. If you have a health insurance policy, it will usually provide some coverage for mental health treatment. I will fill out forms and provide you with whatever assistance I can in helping you receive the benefits to which you are entitled; however, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of my fees. It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers and what the reimbursement procedure entails.

You should carefully read the section in your insurance coverage booklet that describes mental health services. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. Of course, I will provide you with whatever information I can based on my experience and will be happy to help you understand the information you receive from your insurance company. If it is necessary to clear confusion, I will call the company on your behalf.

Due to the rising costs of health care, insurance benefits have increasingly become more complex. It is sometimes difficult to determine exactly how much mental health coverage is available. “Managed Health Care” plans such as HMOs and PPOs often require authorization before they provide reimbursement for mental health services. These plans are often limited to short-term treatment approaches designed to work out specific approval for more therapy after a certain number of sessions. While a lot can be accomplished in short-term therapy, some clients feel they need more services after insurance benefits end.

You should be aware that most insurance companies require you to authorize me to provide them with a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes I have to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of the entire record (rare cases). This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored in a computer. Though all insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, I have no control over what they do with this information once it is in their hands. In some cases, they may share the information with a national medical information databank. I will provide you a copy of any report I submit, at your request.

Once we have all of this information about your insurance coverage we will discuss what we can expect to accomplish with the benefits that are available and what will happen if they run out before you feel ready to end our sessions. It is important to remember that you always have the right to pay for my services yourself to avoid the problems described above.

### ***Contacting Me***

I am often not immediately available by telephone and I most likely will not answer the phone when I am with a client. I do not have specified call-in hours. When I am unavailable you may leave me a message on my confidential voice mail, which I monitor frequently. I will make every effort to return your phone call the same day you made it, with the exception of the weekends and holidays, unless you specify that it is an emergency. If you are difficult to reach, please inform me of some times when you will be available. If you are unable to reach me and feel that you can't wait for me to return your call, contact your daily physician or the nearest emergency room and ask to see the psychiatrist or psychologist on call. If I will be unavailable for an extended time, I will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact, if necessary.

### ***Professional Records***

The laws and standards of my profession require that I keep treatment records. You are entitled to receive a copy of your records, or I can prepare a summary for you instead. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. If you wish to see your records, I recommend that you review them in my presence so that we can discuss the contents. Clients will be charged an appropriate fee for any professional time spent responding to information requests.

### ***Confidentiality***

In general, the privacy of all communications between a client and a therapist is protected by law, and I can only release information about our work to others, including insurance companies, with your written permission. But there are a few exceptions. In most legal proceedings, you have the right to prevent me from providing any information about your treatment. In some proceedings involving child custody and those in which your emotional condition is an important issue, a judge may order my testimony if he/she determines that the issues demand it.

There are some situations in which I am legally obligated to take action to protect others from harm even if I have to reveal some information about a client's treatment. For example, if I believe that a child, elderly person, or person with a disability is being abused, I must file a report with the appropriate state agency.

If I believe that a client is threatening serious bodily harm to another, I am required to take protective actions. These actions may include notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, or seeking hospitalization for the client. If the client threatens to harm himself/herself, I may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her or contact family members or others who can help provide protection. If a similar situation occurs, I will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action.

I usually find it helpful to consult other professionals about a case. During consultation, I make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of a client. The consultant is also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you don't object, I will not tell you about these consultations unless I believe it is important to our therapeutic work.

### ***Group/Couples/Family Counseling***

Counseling within a group, whether it be couples, family, or group therapy, presents special confidentiality issues. As your therapist, I will maintain each group member's confidentiality. I will also encourage each member of the group to adhere to confidentiality inside and outside the group setting. Unfortunately, I cannot guarantee that each member will abide by the confidentiality policy. Therefore, when you participate in a group session, please be aware that what you say could be repeated by a member within the group and exercise caution regarding what you choose to share.

While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important that we discuss any questions or concerns that you may have at our next meeting. I will be happy to discuss these issues with you if you need specific advice, but formal legal advice may be needed because the laws governing confidentiality are quite complex and I am not an attorney.

**Treatment Termination**

If at any time during the course of your treatment I determine I cannot continue, I will terminate treatment and explain why this is necessary. Ideally, therapy ends when we agree your treatment goals have been achieved. Additional conditions for termination include: You have the right to stop treatment at any time. If you make this choice, referrals to other therapist will be provided and you will be asked to attend a final “termination” session.

Professional ethics mandate that treatment continues only if it is reasonably clear you are receiving benefit. If you are meeting with another therapist, you must first terminate treatment with that therapist before I can provide services to you. If you remain with someone else and this becomes apparent after we begin, I am ethically required to terminate treatment. Other legal or ethical circumstances may arise and compel me to terminate treatment. In these cases, appropriate referral(s) will be offered. Additionally, I do not diagnose, treat, or advise on problems outside the recognized boundaries of my competence.

Other situations that warrant termination include: regularly becoming enraged or threatening during sessions; bringing a weapon onto the premises; persistent drug abuse; arriving under the influence of alcohol or drugs; disclosing illegal intentions or actions.



Your signature indicates that you have read the information in this Informed Consent document and agree to abide by its terms during our professional relationship.

Client Name (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

Client Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_