



## **Counseling Services Contract and Informed Consent**

Welcome to our practice. This document contains important information about our professional services and business policies. Please read it carefully and jot down any questions you might have so that we can discuss them at our first meeting. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between us.

### **Counseling Services**

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the therapist and client, and the particular problems you bring forward. There are many different methods we may use to deal with the problems that you hope to address. Psychotherapy is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, it calls for a very active effort on your part. In order for the therapy to be most successful, you will have to work on things we talk about 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 such as improved relationships, finding solutions to specific problems, and experiencing significant reductions in feelings of distress. However, there are no guarantees as to what you will experience.

Our first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, we will be able to offer you some first impressions of what our work will include and a treatment plan to follow, if you decide to continue with therapy. You should evaluate this information along with your own opinions of whether you feel comfortable working with your therapist. 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 our procedures, we should discuss them whenever they arise. If your doubts persist, we will be happy to refer you to another mental health professional for a second opinion.

### **Meetings**

We normally conduct an evaluation that will last from 1 to 2 sessions. During this time, you and your therapist can both decide if your therapist is the best person to provide the services you need in order to meet your treatment goals. If psychotherapy is begun, we will usually schedule one 50-minute session per week at a time we agree on, although some sessions may be longer or more frequent. Once an appointment is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide 24 hours advance notice of cancellation, unless we both agree that you were unable to attend due to circumstances beyond your control. We provide reminder notifications of your appointment in the form of text message forty-eight hours prior to your appointment. At the



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time of the notification you will be provided ample opportunity to cancel or request to reschedule the appointment without penalty. Fees for missed appointments will be charged to your account using the payment source on record.

### **Professional Fees**

Our session fees are \$125.00 for the initial intake assessment and \$100.00 for each 50 minute session. We require a \$25.00 deposit in the form of a debit or credit card for the first appointment. An hourly rate of \$125.00 is charged for other professional services you may need, though we will break down the hourly cost if we work for periods of less than one hour. Other professional 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 us. If you become involved in legal proceedings that require our participation, you will be expected to pay for our professional time even if we are called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement, we charge \$500.00 per hour for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding with an initial deposit of \$2,000.00.

### **Billing and Payment**

You are expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise or unless you have insurance coverage which requires another arrangement. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to when they are requested. In circumstances of unusual financial hardship, we may be willing to negotiate a fee adjustment or payment installment plan. We reserve the right to adjust our payment policy at any time and will notify you of the changes. Such changes may include our session rates and our rates for other services, as well as late/cancelled and no show fees, and the manner in which we collect such rates and fees.

If your account becomes past due and has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements for payment have not been agreed upon, we have the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may include a collection agency or small claims court. If such legal action is necessary, costs will be included in the claim. In most collection situations, the only information we release regarding a client's treatment is his/her name, the nature of services provided, and the amount due. In order to avoid this type of situation you may be required to secure your future appointments with a deposit equal to the session rate by using your payment source on record.



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### **Insurance Reimbursement**

In order to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate your available resources for payment of treatment. If you have a health insurance policy, it usually provides some coverage for mental health treatment. We will file claims and provide you with assistance in helping you receive the benefits to which you are entitled; however, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of our fees. It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

You should carefully read your insurance coverage information describing your mental health services. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. Of course, we will provide you with whatever information we can based on our experience and we will be happy to help you in understanding the information you receive from your insurance company. If it is necessary, to clear confusion, we will be willing to call the company on your behalf.

Insurance benefits have increasingly become more complex and it is sometimes difficult to determine exactly how much mental health coverage is available. Plans 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 problems that interfere with a person's usual level of functioning. It may be necessary to seek approval for more therapy after a designated number of sessions. While a lot can be accomplished in short-term therapy, some clients feel that they need more services after insurance benefits end. Some managed-care plans will not allow us to provide services to you once your benefits end. If this is the case, we will refer you to another provider who will help you continue your psychotherapy. You will also be offered the opportunity to pay privately for your sessions in order to continue your treatment with us, if you choose to do so.

Most insurance companies require you to authorize us to provide them with a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes we have to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of the entire record (in 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, we have no control over what they do with it once it is in their hands. In some cases, they may share the information with a national medical information databank. We will provide you with a copy of any report we submit, if you request it. Once we have all of the 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 our services yourself to avoid the problems described above, unless prohibited by contract.



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### **Contacting Us**

We are often not immediately available by telephone. While we are usually in our office between 9 AM and 5 PM, we will not answer the phone when we are with clients. When we are unavailable, our telephone is answered by voice mail. We will make every effort to return your call on the same day you make it, with the exception of Sundays and holidays. If you are difficult to reach, please inform us of times when you will be available. Due to the limited privacy of text messages, we will not normally respond by text message, but will rather contact you by phone or secured email. If you are unable to reach us and feel that you can't wait for us a return call, contact your family physician, the nearest emergency room, or contact the crisis hotline at (863) 519-3744. If your therapist will be unavailable for an extended time, we will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact, if necessary.

### **Professional Records**

We are required to keep records of the professional services we provide. These records contain information that can be misunderstood by someone who is not a mental health professional. Therefore, it is our general policy that patients may not review them. However, we will provide, at your request, a treatment summary unless we believe that to do so would be emotionally damaging. If that is the case, we will be happy to send the summary to another mental health professional who is working with you. You should be aware that this will be treated in the same manner as any other professional (clinical) service and you will be billed accordingly.

### **Minors**

If you are under eighteen years of age, please be aware that the law may provide your parents the right to examine your treatment records. We will provide them only with general information about our work together, unless we feel there is a high risk that you will seriously harm yourself or someone else. In this case, we will notify them of our concern. Before giving them any information, we will discuss the matter with you, if possible, and do our best to handle any objections you may have with what we are prepared to discuss.

### **Confidentiality**

In general, the privacy of all communications between a patient and a therapist is protected by law, and we can only release information about our work to others with your written permission. But there are a few exceptions. In most legal proceedings, you have the right to prevent us 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 our testimony if he/she determines that the issues demand it. There are some situations in which we are legally obligated to take action to protect others from harm, even if we have to



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reveal some information about a client’s treatment. For example, if we believe that a child, elderly person, or disabled person, is being abused, we must file a report with the appropriate state agency.

If we believe that a client is threatening serious bodily harm to another, we are 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, we may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.

These situations have rarely occurred in our practice. If a similar situation occurs, we will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action.

We may occasionally find it helpful to consult other professionals about a case. During a consultation, we make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of our client. The consultant is also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you don’t object, we will not tell you about these consultations unless we feel that it is important to our work together.

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 first meeting. We 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 we are not attorneys.

Your signature below 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: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_