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Informed Consent For Clients

Welcome to my practice. I appreciate your giving me the opportunity to be of help to you.

This brochure answers some questions that clients often ask about therapy. I believe that our work will be most helpful to you when you have a clear idea of what we are trying to do, how therapy might help you, what my role in it is, and what you can expect.

This brochure talks about the following:

- What will be the goals of therapy?
- What are my methods of treatment?
- How long might therapy take?
- What are the risks and benefits of therapy?
- How much do my services cost, and how do I handle money matters?
- What are some other important concerns?

After you read this brochure, we can talk together about how these issues apply to you. This brochure is yours to keep. Please read all of it. Mark any parts that are not clear to you. Write down any questions you have, so we can discuss them at our next meeting. When you have read and fully understood this brochure, I will ask you to sign it at the end.

About Psychotherapy

I strongly believe that you should feel comfortable with the therapist you choose and hopeful about the therapy. When you feel this way, therapy is more likely to be most helpful to you. Let me describe how I see therapy.

My theoretical approach is based on my a variety of influences including my Masters training at Towson University, and additional training that I received post-graduation. The central ideas in my work are to help each individual work towards developing a healthy sense of self and then live in a way that is self-lead and self-determined. Self reflection, the willingness to be authentic and expressive, and facing things we may otherwise avoid are the most characteristic elements of the type of therapy I provide. The methods I use are varied and are tailored to each individual on a case-by-case basis. If you are interested in hearing about the details of my training or any other relevant aspect of the way I practice, don't hesitate to ask. If you have any questions about the types of treatment that may be helpful to you, I encourage you to bring it up as your collaboration is essential for the success of your therapy.

I usually take notes during our meetings. You may find it useful to take your own notes, to remember important points or the steps you plan to take. You may also wish to take notes outside the office. I usually have a notebook of paper and writing utensils readily available in the office- help yourself. If you don't see them, please ask me about them and I will make them available to you. Alternatively, you may choose to bring your own journal so that you can continue to add to your in-session notes after the session.

By the end of our first or second session, I will tell you how I see your case at this point and how I think we should proceed. I view therapy as a partnership between us. You define the problem areas to be worked on; I use my specialized knowledge to help you make the changes you want to make. Psychotherapy is not like visiting a medical doctor for a shot. It requires your very active involvement. It requires your best efforts to change thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. For example, I will expect you to tell me about important experiences, what they meant to you, and what strong feelings were involved. This is one of the ways you are an active partner in therapy.

In fact, the primary way that you will “make effort to change” will be in your authentic engagement during the sessions. To be clear, therapy is not about advice giving and I do not generally give advice. Therapy, at its core, is an opportunity for you to engage authentically with another authentic person (the therapist) in self-reflection, self-exploration, and self-discovery. Therapy is really about creating, developing and nourishing your *self*.

I expect us to plan our work together. From time to time, we will look together at our progress and goals. If we think we need to, we can then change our treatment plan, its goals, or its methods. As part of your involvement, you may bring up your concerns about your treatment as often as you want.

What we do during the therapy session will be an important part of your growth. However, it will only be one part of it. What you do out of session is equally important. As mentioned, the core of the therapeutic process is self-reflection to create self-awareness. This can be enhanced when there is continuity to the sessions. In between sessions, you may continue to process and think about the content of the session on your own. It will probably be helpful to share these developments at the beginning of the next session. One exercise that many clients find helpful is to journal in between sessions. After a session in the office, write down a summary of what happened during the session and add your follow up thoughts and feelings to it.

I don't generally “teach skills” or techniques. There are many techniques out there that contribute to people making changes that they want. However, techniques designed to create change can often stop a person from discovering what's going on “under the surface” and therefore can actually hinder the therapeutic process of self-discovery. This is somewhat paradoxical, but the more one develops self-acceptance, the more he can change. Yet, the more one tries to change, the harder it becomes to reach self-acceptance. This paradox is known as the Paradox of change, and if you want further clarification about this and how it will affect the therapeutic process working with me, feel free to bring it up with me. Talking about the therapeutic process itself can help it be more efficient.

You will probably have to work on relationships in your life and make long-term efforts to get the best results. These are important parts of personal change. Change will sometimes be easy and quick, but more often it will be slow and difficult and will need repetitions, and so you will need to keep trying. There are no instant, painless cures and no “magic pills.” However, you *can* learn new ways of looking at your problems that will be very helpful for changing your feelings and reactions.

How Long Therapy Might Take

Most of my clients are in therapy for about 2 years. However, this is only an estimated average and cannot be used to predict your own journey and duration in therapy. My experience and theoretical orientation is that the changes people truly yearn for are deep and require working with a depth that can only emerge with patience over a period of time.

The process of ending therapy, called “termination,” can be a very valuable part of our work and well worth spending our time on. Stopping therapy should not be done casually, although either of us may decide to end it if we believe it is in your best interest. If you wish to stop therapy at any time, I ask that you consider to meet then for at least one more session, to review our work together. We will review our goals, the work we have done, any future work that needs to be done, and our options. If you would like to take a “time out” from therapy to try it on your own, we should discuss this. We can

often design such a “time out” to be more helpful.

The Risks and Benefits of Therapy

As with any powerful treatment, there are some risks as well as many benefits of therapy. You should think about both the benefits and risks when making any treatment decisions. For example, in therapy there is a risk that clients will, for a time, have uncomfortable levels of sadness, guilt, anxiety, anger, frustration, loneliness, helplessness, or other negative feelings. Clients may recall unpleasant memories. These feelings or memories may bother them for a while and disrupt their ability to regulate emotions. A few uninformed people in the community may mistakenly view anyone in therapy as weak, or perhaps as seriously disturbed or even dangerous. Also, clients in therapy may have problems with people important to them, like relatives and peers. Family secrets may be told. Therapy may disrupt a marital or couple relationship, and may even lead to a separation or divorce. Sometimes, too, a client’s problems may worsen after the beginning of treatment. Risks like these are temporary and should be expected when people are making important changes in their lives. Finally, even with our best efforts, there is a risk that therapy may not work out as you would like. All of these should be weighed against the costs of not changing and continuing as you are.

While you consider these risks, you should know also that many benefits of therapy have been shown by scientists in hundreds of well-designed research studies. Most clients will find their symptoms greatly lessened, will feel more confident and relaxed, and will improve their daily functioning. People who are depressed may find their mood lifting. Other clients may no longer feel afraid, angry, or anxious. In therapy, people have a chance to talk things out fully until their feelings are relieved or the problems are resolved. Clients’ relationships and coping skills can improve greatly. They may get more satisfaction out of social and family relationships. Their personal goals and values may become clearer. They may grow in many directions—as persons, in their close relationships, in their work or schooling, and in the ability to enjoy their lives.

I do not take on clients I do not think I can help. Therefore, I will enter our relationship with optimism about our progress.

Consultations

If you could benefit from a treatment I cannot provide, I will try to help you to get it. You have a right to ask me about such other treatments, their risks, and their benefits. Based on what I learn about your problems, I may recommend a medical exam or use of medication. If I do this, I will fully discuss my reasons with you, so that you can decide what is best. If you are treated by another professional, I will coordinate my services with him or her and with your own medical doctor if you want me to.

What to Expect from Our Relationship

Psychological services are best provided in an atmosphere of trust. You expect me to be honest with you about your problems and progress. I expect you to be honest with me about your expectations for services, your compliance with medication, and any other barriers to treatment.

As a professional, I will use my best knowledge and skills to help you. In your best interests, there are limits on the relationship between a therapist and a client, and I will abide by these. Let me explain these limits, so you will understand that they don’t apply just to you and me.

First, I am licensed and trained to practice therapy—not law, medicine, finance, or any other profession. I am not able to give you good advice from these other professional viewpoints.

Second, state laws and ethical guidelines require me to keep what you tell me confidential (that is, just between us). You can trust me not to tell anyone else what you tell me, except in a few

unusual situations. I explain what those are in the “About Confidentiality” section of this brochure. For example, I try not to reveal who are my clients. This is part of my effort to maintain your privacy.

If We Meet in Public

If we meet on the street or socially, I may not say hello or talk to you at all. I am not ignoring you; it is a way to maintain the confidentiality of our relationship.

If you ever become involved in a divorce or custody dispute, or any other legal matters (such as a lawsuit over injuries), I want you to understand and agree that I will not provide my records, or evaluations, depositions, or testimony in court. There are several reasons for this: (1) I may not possess the professional skills to make decisions about issues besides those we deal with in therapy; (2) therapy often involves full disclosure of information that you might not want to have revealed in court; (3) if you are holding back information because of that fear, our work will not be as productive as it could be; (4) my statements will be seen as biased in your favor because we have a therapy relationship; and (5) what I might say in testifying or being deposed might change our therapy relationship, and I must put that relationship first. If you want custody evaluations and recommendations, I will be happy to refer you to those with this expertise.

About Confidentiality

I will treat with great care all the information you share with me. It is your legal right that our sessions and my records about you be kept private. That is why I ask you to sign a “release-of-records” form before I can talk about you or send my records about you to anyone else. In general, I will tell no one what you tell me. I will not even let anyone know that you are in treatment with me without your agreement.

In all but a few rare situations, your confidentiality (that is, the privacy of what you tell me) is protected by the rules of my profession. Here are the most likely situations where your confidentiality is *not* protected:

1. If you were sent to me by a court or an employer for evaluation or treatment, the court or employer expects a report from me. If this is your situation, please talk with me before you tell me anything you do not want the court or your employer to know. You have a right to tell me only what you are comfortable telling.
2. Are you suing someone or being sued? Are you charged with a crime? If so, and if you tell the court that you are seeing me, I may then be ordered to show the lawyers my records. Please talk to your lawyer about what to say to me.
3. If you make a serious threat to harm yourself or another person, the law requires me to try to protect you or that other person. I simply cannot promise never to tell others about threats you make.
4. If I believe that a child, older adult, or other dependent person has been or will be abused or neglected, I am legally required to report this to the authorities.

As a therapist, my legal and moral duty is to protect your confidentiality, but I also have a duty under the law to the wider community and to myself if there is harm, threat of harm, or threat of neglect.

Parents and/or guardians with legal custody can be told about their child’s diagnoses, the counseling methods used and recommended, significant safety concerns, and the progress of treatment, either as needed or when requested.

There are times when I might talk about you with another therapist. I ask you now to understand and agree to let me do this in these instances.

I sometimes talk with other therapists or other professionals about my clients, because it helps me to provide high-quality treatment. These professionals are also required to keep your information

private. I maintain your privacy with them. I never tell them your name, I change or skip some facts about you, and I tell only what they need to know to understand your situation and help me.

We consult with colleagues and specialists about our ongoing work. This pursuit of quality assurance never involves your name or any specifics through which you might be identified.

For the purpose of these consultations, I may want to make audio or video recordings of our sessions. I will review the recordings with my consultant to assist with your treatment. I will ask your permission to make any recording. I promise to destroy each recording as soon as I no longer need it, or, at the latest, when I destroy your case records. You can refuse to allow this recording, or can insist that the recording be edited.

If your records need to be seen by another professional, or anyone else, I will discuss this with you. If you agree to share these records, you will need to sign a release-of-information form. This form says exactly what information is to be shared, with whom, and why. You may read this form at any time. If you have questions, please ask me.

It may be beneficial for me to confer with your primary care physician (*sic*) with regard to your psychological treatment or to discuss any medical problems for which you are receiving treatment.

It is my office policy to destroy clients' records several years after our last meeting.

If I must discontinue our relationship because of illness, disability, or other presently unforeseen circumstances, I ask you to agree to let me transfer your records to another clinician who will make sure they are kept safe, confidential, and available when you want them, and then destroy them someday.

In some very rare situations, I may temporarily remove parts of your records before you see them. This may happen if I believe that the information will be harmful to you, but I will discuss this with you.

You have the right to ask that your information not be shared with family members or others, and I can agree to that limitation. You can also tell me if you want me to send mail, or phone you at a more private location or number than, say, your home or workplace. If this is of concern to you, please tell me so that we can make arrangements.

About Our Appointments

The very first time I meet with you, we will need to give each other a lot of basic information. Following this, we will usually meet for a 50-minute session once or twice a week, depending on your needs and preferences. We can schedule meetings at times convenient for both of us. I will tell you at least a month in advance of my vacations or any other times we cannot meet. Please ask about my schedule in making your own plans.

Cancellations and No-Shows

I consider our meetings very important and make them a priority over other activities and I ask you to do the same. An appointment is a commitment to our work. A cancelled appointment slows our progress, so please try not to miss sessions if you can possibly help it. Your session time is reserved for you.

We agree to meet at my office and to be on time. If I am ever unable to start on time, I ask your understanding and promise that you will receive the full time agreed to or be charged proportionately. If you are late, we will probably be unable to meet for the full time, because it is likely that I will have another appointment after yours. If you are 15 minutes late, the appointment will be considered missed and I won't be able to provide services, even for the remaining time of the scheduled appointment.

I am rarely able to fill a cancelled session, so you will be charged the full fee for sessions cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice, for other than the serious reasons. However, if I am able to fill the cancelled session, then you will not be charged.

Fees, Payments, and Billing

Payment for services is an important part of any professional relationship. This is even more true in therapy; one treatment goal is to make relationships and the duties and obligations they involve clear. You are responsible for seeing that my services are paid for. Meeting this responsibility shows your commitment and maturity.

My current regular fees are as follows. I reevaluate my fees periodically, based on changes in the cost of running my business. If my fees are to change, you will be notified ahead of time.

Regular therapy services: For a single session of 45-50 minutes, the fee is \$150.

Please pay for each session at its start. I have found that this arrangement helps us stay focused on our goals and works best. It also allows me to keep my fees lower, because it cuts down on my bookkeeping costs. I suggest that you make out your check or ready your credit card before each session begins, so that our time will be used fully. Other payment or fee arrangements must be worked out before the end of our first meeting. I accept cash, checks, credit and debit cards, and health care spending cards in the office or by phone.

Extended sessions: Occasionally it may be better to go on with a session, if possible, than to stop or postpone work on a particular issue. This extension time will be charged on a pro-rated basis. It is also likely that your insurance will not pay for extra time, and so I will bill you.

I realize that my fees involve a substantial amount of money, although they are well in line with similar professionals' charges. For you to get the best value for your money, we must work hard and well.

I will assume that our agreed-upon financial arrangements will continue as long as I provide services to you. I will assume this until you tell me in person, by telephone, or by certified mail that you wish to end it. You have a responsibility to pay for any services you receive before we end the relationship.

Because I expect full payment at the time of our meetings, I usually do not send bills. However, if we have agreed that I will bill you, I ask that the bill be paid within 10 days of the billing date.

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. In most collection situations, the only facts I release regarding a client's treatment are his or her name, the kind of services provided, and the amount due. If such legal action is necessary, its costs will be included in the claim.

If you think you may have trouble paying your bills at times, please discuss this with me. If your unpaid balance reaches \$280, I must stop therapy with you.

Insurance

I have chosen not to join or participate in any health insurance plans or panels. If you choose to use your insurance, I will not file claims for you, but I will give you a receipt for my services with the information the insurers need to pay you back if allowed by your contract. This information will include standard diagnostic and procedure codes, the times we met, my charges, and your payments.

Because I do not have a contract with your insurance company, it may pay a part of my fees as an out-of-network provider.

Emergency Services

I am not immediately available via phone as I am often busy working with clients. Therefore, you should leave a message if it is not an emergency situation. I generally am able to return calls within 24 hours.

I do NOT provide crisis intervention or emergency services. If you are experiencing an emergency, or are uncertain if your situation is an emergency, PLEASE CALL 911 or go immediately to your nearest Emergency Room.

Communication in Between Sessions

As mentioned, I am not immediately available via phone and in general can be difficult to reach during the week. Please remember and understand, the work we do together primarily takes place during the session. I cannot provide Counseling or Therapy on the phone during the week in between session. In general, I discourage telephone calls to discuss therapy related issues.

I find that telephone therapy does not work as well as face-to-face therapy, and so I discourage it. I will generally suggest our meeting if you call with a problem that is not critical.

Other Points

You may not make any kind of electronic recording of our sessions without my written consent.

Many clients use email and text messaging, but these are not secure and could lead to a loss of confidentiality. In general, I recommend using text only for logistical messages such as relating to scheduling.

I will charge you at my regular rate for letters, reports, and similar documents you ask me to create for you.

As part of the confidentiality that I offer you, I ask you not to disclose the name or identity of any other client being seen in this office.

Shared Office Space

Although I share this office space with other professionals and we use some office equipment together, we are not in business together as partners, employers, or employees. I do not routinely consult with them on cases, or make referrals to or receive referrals from them. We are all independent licensed professionals.

Collecting Information on Progress and Outcomes

As a professional therapist, I naturally want to know more about how therapy helps people. To understand therapy better, I must collect information about clients before, during, and after treatment. Therefore, I may ask you to help me by filling out some questionnaires about different parts of your life—relationships, changes, concerns, attitudes, and other areas. I ask your permission to take what you write on these questionnaires and what I have in my records, and to use it in research or teaching that I may do in the future. If I ever use the information from your questionnaire, it will always be included with information from many other clients, and you will never be identified. All personal information will be disguised and changed.

When You Have a Complaint or Concern

Problems can arise in our relationship, just as in any other relationship. If you are not satisfied with any area of our work, please raise your concerns with me as soon as possible. Our work together will be slower and harder if your concerns with me are not worked out. Some issues that arise between us may be clinically relevant to other relationships in your life. I will make every effort to hear any complaints you have and to seek resolution. If you feel that I have treated you unfairly or have broken a professional rule, please tell me.

In my practice as a therapist, I do not discriminate against clients because of any of these factors: age, sex/gender, sexual orientation, marital or family status, race, color, religious beliefs, ethnic origin, place of residence, veteran status, physical disability, health status, or criminal record

professional) would appreciate your referring other people to me who might also be able to make use of my services.

Copy accepted by parent/guardian/other or Copy kept by therapist
