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OUTPATIENT SERVICE CONTRACT

Welcome to my practice. This document contains important information about my professional services and business policies. Please read it carefully and ask any questions that you might have so that we can discuss them. Once you sign for this, it will constitute a binding agreement between us.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personality of the therapist and the client and the particular problems which the client brings. There are a number of different approaches that can be utilized to address the problems you hope to address. It is not like visiting a medical doctor, in that *psychotherapy* requires a very active effort on your part. In order to be most successful, you will have to work on things we talk about both during our sessions and at home.

Psychotherapy has both benefits and risks. Risks sometimes include experiencing uncomfortable feelings such as sadness, guilt, anxiety, anger, and frustration, loneliness and helplessness. Psychotherapy often requires discussing unpleasant aspects of your life. Psychotherapy has been shown to have benefits for people who participate in it. Therapy may lead to a significant reduction in feelings of distress, better relationships, and resolutions of specific problems. But, there are no guarantees about what will happen.

Our first few sessions will involve an assessment of your needs. By the end of this assessment process, I will be able to offer you some initial impressions of what our work will include and an initial treatment plan to follow, if you decide to continue. You should evaluate this information along with your own assessment about 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 any questions about our procedures, we should discuss them whenever they arise. If your doubt persists, we will be happy to help you to secure an appropriate consultation with another mental health professional.

MEETINGS

My normal practice is to conduct an evaluation which will last one to three sessions. During this time, we can both decide whether I am the best person to provide the services which you need in order to meet your treatment objectives. If psychotherapy is initiated, I will usually schedule one fifty minute session (one appointment hour of fifty minutes duration) per week, or as needed, at a mutually agreed upon time. Sometimes sessions will be longer or more frequent. Once the appointment is scheduled, you will be expected to attend and pay for the session unless you provided 24 hours advance notice of cancellation (or unless we both agree that you were unable to attend due to circumstances which were beyond your control). If it is possible, we can try to find another time during the week to reschedule the appointment.

PROFESSIONAL FEES

The Initial Diagnostic Interview (first visit) is higher than a regular session fee. The interview fee is \$175. My hourly fee for an individual appointment is \$100 and for a family appointment \$125. In addition to therapy appointments, it is my practice to charge this amount on a pro-rated basis for other professional services you may require such as shorter or longer sessions, report writing, telephone conversations which last longer than 20 minutes, attendance at meetings or consultations with other professionals which you have authorized, preparation of records, treatment summaries, or the time required to perform any other service which you may request of me. If you become involved in litigation which requires my participation, you will be expected to pay for the professional time required to testify or prepare for my involvement in the court case.

BILLING AND PAYMENTS

You will be expected to pay for each session in full 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 upon at the time these services are requested.

If your account is more than 60 days in arrears and suitable arrangements for payment have not been made, I have the option of using legal means to secure payment, including collection agencies. In most cases, the only information which I release about a client's treatment would be the client's name, nature of the service provided, and the amount due.

INSURANCE REIMBURSEMENT

In order for us to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate what resources are 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 provide you with whatever assistance I can in facilitating your receipt of the benefits to which you are entitled including filling out forms, etc. It is important that you call your insurance company before you come in for your first appointment, and inquire about eligibility and benefits. However, you, not your insurance company, will remain responsible for full payment of the fee which we have agreed to. Therefore, it is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

You should carefully read the section in your insurance coverage booklet which describes mental health services. If you have questions, you should call your plan administrator and inquire. Of course, I will provide you with whatever information I can based on my experience and will be happy to assist you in deciphering the information you receive from your carrier.

The escalation of the cost of health care has resulted in an increasing level of complexity about insurance benefits which sometimes make it difficult to determine how much mental health coverage is available. "Managed Health Care Plans" such as HMO's and PPO's often require advance authorization before they will provide reimbursement for mental health services. These plans are often oriented toward a short term approach designed to resolve specific problems that are interfering with one's usual level of functioning. It may be necessary to seek additional authorizations after a certain number of sessions. In my experience, while quite a lot can be accomplished in short term therapy, some clients feel that more services are necessary after insurance benefits expire. (Some managed health care companies will not allow me to provide services to you once your benefits are no longer available. If this is the case, I will do my best to find another provider who will help you continue your therapy).

You as the consumer should also be aware that most insurance agreements require you to authorize me to provide a clinical diagnosis, and sometimes additional clinical information such as a treatment plan or summary. In rare cases, a copy of the record is requested. This information will become part of the insurance company file. All insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, but once it is in their hands, I have no control over what they do with it. In some cases they may share the information with a national medical information data bank. If you request it, I will provide you with a copy or any report which I submit. Once we have all the information about your insurance coverage, we will discuss what we can expect to accomplish with the benefits available and what will happen if the benefits 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 and avoid the complexities which are described above.

CONTACTING ME

I am often not immediately available by telephone. I usually will not answer the phone when I am with a client. When I am unavailable, please leave a message and I will return your phone call as soon as possible or at some point during the day. If you are difficult to reach, please leave a time that you would be available. If you cannot reach me during an emergency, you should call your family physician or the emergency room at the nearest hospital and ask for the mental health professional on call. You may also need to call 911. If I am unavailable for an extended time, I will provide you with the name of a trusted colleague whom you can contact if necessary.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDS

Both the law and the standards of my profession require that I keep appropriate treatment records. You are entitled to receive a copy of the records, but if you wish, I can prepare an appropriate summary. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or be upsetting to lay readers. If you wish to see your records, I recommend that you review them in my presence so that we can discuss the contents. (I am sometimes willing to conduct such a meeting without charge). Clients will be charged an appropriate fee for any preparation time which is required to comply with an information request.

MINORS

If you are under 19 years of age, please be aware that the law may provide your parents with the right to examine your treatment records. It is my policy to request an agreement from parents that they consent to give up access to your records. If they agree, I will provide them only with general information about our work together unless I feel there is a high risk that you will seriously harm yourself or someone else, in which case I will notify them of my concern. I will also provide them with a verbal or written summary of your treatment when it is complete.

Before giving them any information I will discuss the matter with you, if possible, and will do the best I can to resolve any objections you may have about what I am prepared to discuss.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In general, the confidentiality of all communications between a client and a psychologist is protected by law, and I can only release information about our work to others with your written permission. However, we are required to disclose confidential information if any of the following conditions exist:

1. You are a danger to yourself or others.
2. You seek treatment to avoid detection or apprehension or enable anyone to commit a crime.
3. Your therapist was appointed by the courts to evaluate you.
4. Your contact with your therapist is for the purpose of determining sanity in a criminal proceeding.
5. Your contact is for the purpose of establishing your competence.
6. The contact is one in which your psychotherapist must file a report to a public employer or as to information required to be recorded in public office, if such report or record is open to public inspection.
7. You are under the age of 16 years and are the victim of a crime.
8. You are a minor and your therapist reasonably suspects you are the victim of child abuse.
9. You are a person over the age of 65 and your therapist believes you are the victim of physical abuse. Your therapist may disclose information if you are the victim of emotional abuse.
10. You die and the communication is important to decide an issue concerning a deed or conveyance, will, or other writing executed by you affecting an interest in property.
11. You file suit against your therapist for breach of duty or your therapist files suit against you.
12. You have filed suit against anyone and have claimed mental/emotional damages as part of the suit.
13. You waive your rights to privilege or give consent to limited disclosure by your therapist.
14. Your insurance company paying for services has the right to review all records.

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 which you may have at our next meeting. The laws governing these issues are quite complex. While I am happy to discuss these issues with you, should you need specific advice, formal legal consultation may be desirable. If you request, I will provide you with relevant portions or summaries of the applicable state laws governing these issues.

End