

# *LITTLE HOUSE ON MACKINAW*

## THE THERAPEUTIC CONTRACT

### PROFESSIONAL DISCLOSURE AND TREATMENT CONTRACT

#### **Purpose of This Document**

This document is intended to answer the commonly asked questions about the services Little House on Mackinaw provides. Our hope in providing this information is that you will be informed about Little House, the therapy that we provide, and important policies of our private practice in order that we can assure a 'good fit' for one another. We work collaboratively and believe that the client benefits when there is an open exchange between us. **This document, along with the attached *Consent to Treatment* will serve as a Therapeutic Contract.** It contains your (or your child's) rights as a client, as well as fee information and circumstances when information may be released about you (or your child). Remember, it is your right to have a complete explanation of therapy; please feel free to ask any questions you may have.

#### **A Little Bit About Little House**

Little House opened in 2015 with a commitment to providing a homey, nurturing environment where one can feel safe and secure when addressing difficult issues. The therapists at Little House are fully licensed master level mental health professionals. Additionally, our therapists have earned and maintain post-graduate certifications in specialized areas of interest. Your therapist will be happy to share information regarding their post-graduate credentials if you ask. Our work is relationship-based which means that even when we work with a client on an individual basis there may be family involvement of some kind at some point. Little House clinicians focus on promoting healthy attachment and development in families with infants and young children as well as helping children, families and individuals heal from loss and traumatic experiences. We utilize client-centered approaches such as relationship-based, play, art, and other expressive interventions. Our therapists have worked in not-for-profit, public health and community mental health agency settings.

#### **How Long Does Therapy Last?**

This depends largely upon you (or your child) and the goals of therapy. We all need help at one time or another and we believe it takes courage to ask for it; seeking help is a sign of health, not pathology. Everyone deserves a positive relationship with themselves and those around them. To achieve this, we will work together to determine what the goals of therapy will be. Depending on the nature of those goals, we will decide realistically how short-term or long-term therapy will be. For some, it may be a few sessions and for others it may be for many months. You (and/or your child or family if appropriate) will be the biggest part of this decision-making process and there is always room for making adjustments.

Sessions typically last 50 to 60 minutes though some insurance policies will only pay for 45-minute sessions. We do our best to stay within the limits of sessions but there are certainly times that we run over. We respectfully ask that you be tolerant with this; there may come a time when an important issue arises in the last 5 minutes of your session, and we will do our best to meet those immediate needs in a mindful manner and without unfinished business needing

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to wait until a next session. We thank you in advance for timely arrival for your scheduled appointment.

### **Your Rights As A Client and The Boundaries of Our Relationship**

There are many approaches to therapy and many different kinds of therapists. You (and/or your child) have a right to ask questions about any part of the therapy process. You (and your child) have the right to stop therapy at any time without any obligations other than the costs accrued. You (and your child) have the right to confidentiality of information. Within limits, the information from our sessions will not be revealed to any other person or agency without your written permission.

When a child is the client, there is, at times, a very difficult balance to maintain with regards to what information is shared with parents. Please understand that therapy involves trust and disclosing certain information to parents may breach the trust relationship between the child client and therapist. Your therapist will do their best to maintain a balance that feels safe and respectful to both the child and the parent. If there are concerns about this issue, please bring it to your therapist's attention immediately.

The therapeutic relationship is one that should be grounded in respect and trust. If you should ever feel that anyone at Little House has done something that has hurt or offended, please talk it over with them immediately. Please do not make defamatory comments about the therapist, Little House, or its business associates to others or post defamatory commentary on the web or on social media sites; Little House will abide by these same standards. Your signature on page 5 indicates that you agree to this.

There are times when the State of Michigan requires us to share information (in order to protect children or for the purposes listed below) without your written authorization. There may be additional circumstances under which we may release information:

- If you (or your child) threaten bodily harm to self or someone else.
- If you (or your child) reveal information related to child abuse or neglect.
- If a Court of Law issues a subpoena or court order to release the information specifically described in the subpoena or court order.
- In court proceedings involving the care and protection of children in child custody or adoption cases.
- If a mandated reporter believes a child, a disabled person, or an elderly person in your family is suffering abuse or neglect.
- To provide information regarding your diagnosis, prognosis and course of treatment, or for purposes of quality assurance or audits, of a third party payer (such as insurance payments).
- If legal or professional board action is brought against Little House personnel and disclosure is necessary/relevant to a defense.
- If necessary to use a collection agency or other process to collect amounts owed for services.

The fact that other instances are not included in this list does not preclude the exercise of our releasing information.

Your therapist will keep records pertaining to treatment goals and progress towards those goals for each session. If an insurance company is paying for any of your treatment they may request information regarding your treatment. Little House will only release that information necessary to secure payment of benefits for services rendered or obtain authorization for further sessions. Therapists at Little House seek supervision from other professionals regarding the families that they work with as a part of their regular practice. They do not provide information by which someone could identify you.

### **Legal Issues**

While we respect your constitutional right to bear arms, Little House on Mackinaw is a weapons free zone. **Please make certain that any items that can be construed or used as a weapon remain off of the property.**

We respectfully request that we be notified immediately if any legal issues arise for you (litigation, criminal investigation, custody matters, employment disputes, separation/divorces, etc.) as it may affect the course of treatment. In joint custody cases, we require signed consent by both parents and/or legal guardians for a child to receive treatment. Due to the nature of the therapeutic process and the reality that it often involves making full disclosure regarding many matters which may be of a confidential nature, we respectfully ask that respect be given to the confidentiality of client records including those of a child client. Should there be legal proceedings involving a child in our services, including but not limited to divorce and custody disputes, we request that you, your attorneys, or anyone acting on your behalf, NOT subpoena child client records from Little House without an appropriate release, consent by all parents or guardian(s), and/or a HIPAA Qualified Protective Order. We will appropriately respond to a subpoena to testify in a court or other administrative hearing, but we reserve the right to affirm or make recommendations to protect the best interests of the child, including but not limited to information that may impact parenting time or custody or the safety or well-being of the child. By your signature on page 5, you agree to abide by this agreement. If you have concerns about agreeing to this, please inform us of those concerns upon entry into the therapy office. If a therapist is subpoenaed to testify, it is important to understand that there could be unavoidable therapeutic harm done to a child. It is within therapist's sole discretion as to whether they reveal specific comments of a child.

### **Communicating Outside of the Office Environment and Electronic Media**

Little House can be contacted in a variety of ways and we will do our best to communicate with you in a manner that is a best fit for you. We have a website: [www.littlehouseonmackinaw.com](http://www.littlehouseonmackinaw.com). You may contact your therapist confidentially via the website using the 'Contact Your Therapist' section found on bar at the top of the homepage. Therapist confidential e-mail is [\(therapist first name\)@littlehouseonmackinaw.com](mailto:(therapist first name)@littlehouseonmackinaw.com). The Little House office phone number is **989.790.2005**; you may leave a voicemail message. **Please note that this is a land line phone and is not HIPAA compliant.** The best way to communicate confidentially is via e-mail (\*\*\*\*\*@littlehouseonmackinaw.com). We will do our best to get back to you as soon as possible. Little House therapists and business associates use and respond to text and voice-mail messages, preferably only to arrange or modify appointments or address billing issues. It is our preference and strong recommendation that matters referring to assessment, treatment, session content or concerns of a confidential nature only be addressed during scheduled office appointments or via confidential e-mail. Additionally, prior knowledge and informed, written consent is required on the part of all parties present, including Little House personnel, for any electronic recording of the content of our therapeutic sessions or extraneous communications. It is also important to remember that our work requires that we be in session with clients and we do not interrupt sessions to receive communications or make contact with other clients. Should you (or your child) be experiencing a crisis/emergency, it is always best to call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room.

Telephone and text communications with Little House personnel are not HIPAA compliant. This means that confidentiality cannot be assured. If maintaining HIPAA compliant confidentiality is important to you, please **DO NOT** rely on these types of communication to discuss sensitive issues; either schedule an office appointment so that communication is face to face, or use the HIPAA compliant email: [\\*\\*\\*\\*@littlehouseonmackinaw.com](mailto:****@littlehouseonmackinaw.com) that is reliable. Communication via e-mail, telephone and text for the purpose of scheduling an appointment does not require HIPAA compliance.

Any electronic transmissions of information will be retained in the logs of my service providers and, while it is unlikely that someone will look at these logs, they are, in theory, available to be read by the system administrators of my service providers. Any e-mails or text messages received by us and our responses will become part of the clinical record. We do not accept requests to connect from current or former clients on any social networking sites. Allowing for connection on these sites can compromise confidentiality and privacy of both the client and the treatment provider. It can also blur the boundaries of the professional relationship.

### **Payment Policy**

Insurance policies are complex documents and it is the member's responsibility to know their benefit plan. It is important that you take the time to become familiar with your mental/behavioral plan benefits. Please notify us immediately should you get a new card or if your benefits change as this can affect payment for services and the amount you may owe. The fee for each session is due at the time of the session and we are grateful if copays are paid at that time. But we also understand that there may be changes in policy or deductibles that vary and that this can make the payment due an inexact estimate. Additionally, insurances may be slow to pay or make receiving payment for services a difficult process. We will bill you monthly for any balance due.

When the client is a child of separated/divorced parents, the parent who brings the child to a particular session will be responsible for payment of copays. Deductibles will be billed to the insurance member. It will then be the responsibility of the billed parent to collect (via FOC, if nec.) money owed by the other parent.

Billing your insurance is a courtesy that Little House provides, and we appreciate your cooperation with billing. Failure to provide necessary information for billing your insurance in a timely manner will result in services being billed to you as the responsible party. We have a medical biller who is diligent and thoughtful with her work, but she is a part-time employee and not always immediately available. She will do her best to accommodate your requests for help and information. Little House's standard fee is \$190 for the initial assessment and \$135/hour for subsequent 60-minute sessions. Many of our contracts with insurance companies are for less than that and we accept their scheduled payment assignment. Also, your therapist may offer a sliding scale fee for anyone who pays out of pocket; that sliding scale fee schedule is available upon request.

