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## **Therapy Overview and Agreements**

### **About Psychotherapy**

Because you will be putting a good deal of time, money, and energy into therapy, you should choose a therapist carefully. I strongly believe you should feel comfortable with the therapist you choose, and hopeful about the prospects of therapy. Let me describe how I see therapy.

- I believe in the inherent worth and resilience of people, even in times of great need.
- Often times, it is what a person thinks about their situation or self (cognitions) that leads them to feeling or behaving in an unhelpful way. I will work with you to identify these thoughts and teach you ways to deal with them.
- Other times, it may be your body that holds on to stress and through body awareness, insight can be achieved.
- I strive to use a mix of skill building, cognitive reframing, body awareness and play (for children) in a caring environment to create the change you are hoping for in your life or that of your loved one.
- The goals of treatment are to assess your areas of strength and need and help you build on both to create the life you want.
- I use is a combination of *Cognitive-Behavioral* and *Person Centered Therapies*. Feel free to ask me for more information about these approaches.

As with any treatment, there are some risks as well as benefits. You should think about both when making any treatment decisions.

### **Benefits of Therapy**

The benefits of therapy are well researched. Through therapy, people who are depressed may find their mood lifting; others may no longer feel afraid, angry or anxious. In therapy, people have a chance to talk things out and build new skills and understanding until they experience relief from their problems. Children use play as their “talking it out” and can obtain relief through the use of therapeutic play. Clients’ relationships and coping skills may 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.

### **Risks of Therapy**

There is a risk that you or your loved one will, for a time, have uncomfortable levels of sadness, guilt, anxiety, anger, frustration, loneliness, helplessness, or other uncomfortable feelings. Clients may recall unpleasant memories; these feelings or memories may bother a client at work or in school. Also, clients in therapy may have problems with people important to them; family secrets may be told. Therapy may disrupt a marital relationship and sometimes may even lead to a divorce. Sometimes, a client’s problems may temporarily worsen after the beginning of treatment. These types of outcomes are possible 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 well for you.

### **What to Expect from Our Relationship**

As a professional, I will use my best knowledge and skills to help you. This includes following the standards of being a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) of which I am in good standing. Being a LMHC puts limits on the relationship between a therapist and a client, and I will abide by these. Let me explain these limits, so you will not think they are personal responses to you.

First, I am licensed and trained to practice psychotherapy—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 the rules of being a LMHC require me to keep what you tell me confidential. You can trust me not to tell anyone else what you tell me, except in certain limited situations. I explain these in more detail in the *Notice of Privacy* *handout*. I do not reveal who my clients are; this is part of my effort to maintain your privacy. If we meet on the street or socially, I may not say hello or talk to you very much. My behavior will not be a personal reaction to you, but a way to maintain the confidentiality of our relationship. If you initiate a conversation with me, I will respond but not about personal matters in public. Please note that others who are with you may inquire about how you know me.

Third, in your best interest, and following the LMHC’s ethical standards, I can only be your therapist. I can **never** have a sexual or romantic relationship with any client during, or after, the course of therapy. I cannot have a business relationship with any of my clients, other than the therapy relationship. Even though you might invite me, I will not ethically be able to attend social gatherings, such as parties or weddings.

### **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, please see *Notice of Privacy*. That is why I will ask you to sign a “release-of-information” form before I can talk about you or send my records about you to anyone else.

I use a **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act** or HIPPA compliant Electronic Medical Record (EMR) service that I use called Therapy Notes. This is a cloud based health record that meets the standards set forth by the federal government. If you are not comfortable with my use of this system, please let me know prior to your first appointment, as I will not be able to see you.

### **Appointments**

I usually schedule your first meeting, which is also called the intake, for between 60 and 90 mins. Following the intake, if we both feel like I can assist you with your concerns, we will schedule a time to meet weekly in 45-minute sessions.

An appointment is a commitment to our work. We agree to meet and to be on time. If I am ever unable to start on time, I ask for your understanding, as it will be due to a prior client emergency. I also assure you that

you will receive the full time agreed to. If you are late, we will probably not be able to meet for the full time, because it is likely that I will have another appointment after yours.

My waiting room is child friendly, but I do not have office staff that can attend to your child(s) needs or ensure their safety. If you need to bring your child to your session but they will not be part of the therapy, please make arrangements for an adult to accompany you to provide childcare in my waiting room.

Most of my clients see me once a week until we both see significant relief from your concerns. After that, we may meet less often for several more months to ensure that the changes you have made are being sustained.

When you have reached a level of goal attainment you are happy with, therapy can end or we can set new goals. *Of course, you may choose to end therapy at any time. If you decide to stop coming, please allow for one final session so that we can review our work together and say goodbye.* I may send you a brief set of questions sometime after our last session. These questions will ask you to look back at our work together.

**I ask that you agree, as part of entering therapy with me, to return this follow-up form and to be very open about what you did or did not find helpful in the therapy. I take your constructive feedback very seriously and will use it to improve my practices.**

### **Fees, Payments, and Billing**

Please try not to miss any sessions. When you must cancel, please try to give me at minimum, a week's notice. Your session time is reserved for you. If you are not able to give me at least 24 hours of notice to cancel I will have to charge my cancellation fee. Your insurance will not cover this charge. You will be charged the full fee for a session if you do not show and do not call to cancel, for other than the most serious reasons.

Payment for services is an important part of any professional relationship. My current regular fees are listed on my colleague's website [ahotchkiss.com](http://ahotchkiss.com). Even if you use your health insurance plan, you will be responsible for any services that they deem "not medically necessary". Co-pay or fees are due at the time of service. If you are paying by check, I suggest making it out before each session begins, so that our time will be used to maximum benefit.

*Telephone consultations, reports and other services:* Infrequent telephone consultations and short reports are a normal part of the service I provide to you and are included in the fee for weekly services. If the need for more regular out of session work is required we will discuss the specifics of my fees and payment arrangements.

### **Statement of Principles and Complaint Procedures**

It is my intention to fully abide by all the rules of the Massachusetts State licensing agency.

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 at once.** Our work together will be slower and harder if your concerns with me are not worked out. I will make every effort to hear any complaints you have and to seek solutions to them. If you feel that I, or any other therapist, has treated you unfairly or has even broken a professional rule, please tell me. You can also contact the state or local counseling association and speak to the chairperson of the ethics committee. He or she can help clarify your concerns or tell you how to file a complaint.

In my practice as a therapist, I do not discriminate against clients for any reasons, here are just a few examples: age, sex, marital/family status, race, color, religious beliefs, ethnic origin, place of residence, veteran status, physical disability, health status, sexual orientation, or criminal record unrelated to present dangerousness. **This is a personal commitment,** as well as being required by federal, state, and local laws and regulations. I will always take steps to advance and support the values of equal opportunity, human dignity, and racial/ethnic/cultural diversity. **If you believe you have been discriminated against, please bring this matter to my attention immediately.**

### **Reaching me and Crisis Calls**

I encourage clients to contact me if they have questions or are struggling with something we have been working on. However, I cannot promise that I will be available at all times to answer your call. **I do not** take phone calls when I am with a client. When you call, please leave a message and I will return your call as soon as I can. Generally, I will return messages daily.

If you have an emergency or crisis, your safety is my utmost concern. If it is a life-threatening crisis, please contact **911** first to receive immediate attention. If you feel you are not in danger, but can benefit from some coaching or support, please contact me and leave a message and I will return your call as soon as I am able. If the crisis persists and I have not been able to contact you, there is an excellent **24/7-crisis** service provided through the Carson Center.

**The Carson Crisis Center number is 413-568-6386.**

*I truly appreciate the chance you have given me to be of professional service to you, and look forward to a successful relationship with you.*

*If you are satisfied with my services, there is no greater complement you can pay me than telling others you know who might also benefit from my services.*

**Please print out the signature page that is listed in a separate file and bring to your next appointment.**