Melissa Shane Counseling Services LLC

Limits of the Therapy Relationship: What Clients Should Know

Psychotherapy is a professional service I am able to provide to you. However, because of the nature of therapy, our relationship has to be different from most other relationships. It may differ in how long it lasts, in the topics we discuss, or in its goals. It must also be limited to the relationship of therapist and client only. If we were to interact in any other ways, we would then have a “dual relationship,” which might be harmful and may not be legal. The different therapy professions all have rules against such relationships to protect us both. Let me explain why having a dual relationship is not a good idea.

Dual relationships can set up conflicts between your best interests and my best interests. What is best for you might not be what is best for me, and I must put your interests before my own, because you are my client. So we must have only one relationship.

Because I am your therapist, dual relationships like these are improper:

* I cannot be your supervisor or evaluator for custody, disability, or similar issues.
* I cannot serve as your advocate or take your side in any legal matter or court action.
* I cannot have any other kind of business relationship with you besides for therapy. For example, I cannot employ you, lend to or borrow from you, trade or barter your services (such as for tutoring, repairing, child care, etc.) for mine, or trade goods for therapy.
* I cannot give legal, medical or financial advice.
* We should not exchange gifts.
* I will not “friend” clients on social media or accept clients’ “friend” requests.

There are important differences between therapy and friendship. While I expect us to be friendly and respectful, as your therapist I cannot be a typical friend. Friendships are two-way exchanges, but in therapy I will offer very little about myself and my feelings, because our focus is on you and your needs and development. Friends usually see you only from their personal viewpoints and experiences, and I will try to be more objective and nonjudgmental. Friends may want to find quick and simple solutions to your problems so that they can feel helpful, but these responses may not be in your long-term best interest, which is our goal. Therapists can focus on issues and motives that are not apparent and that require persistent exploration for change to occur. Friends do not usually follow up on their advice to see whether it was useful; therapists do follow up to be more helpful. Friends may feel a need to have you do what they advise; a therapist offers you options and helps you choose what is best for you. A therapist’s responses to your situation are based on tested theories and proven methods of change, not just personal experiences. To preserve your confidentiality, therapists are required to keep the identity of their clients private. Therefore, I will let you take the lead on whether to acknowledge or recognize me if we meet in a public place, and I will decline to attend your family’s gatherings if you invite me. Lastly, when our therapy is completed, I will not be able to be a friend to you like your other friends.

In sum, my duty as a therapist is to care for you and all my clients, but only in the professional role of therapist. Please let me know if you have any questions or concerns so we can discuss them.

Text Messages and After Hour Calls

You have access to my cell phone number to contact me, after hours, for appointments, cancellations and urgent issues. You are welcome to call my cell phone and send me texts and your signature below acknowledges that you agree to receive phone and text responses from me. Although I will do my best to keep all contact you make with me confidential, your signature below also acknowledges that texting should be limited and only used rarely and that any information you text is not guaranteed HIPAA secure, as such messages are sent over cell phones and are not encrypted. Your signature below also acknowledges that in emergencies you should dial 911 or go to your nearest emergency room. Non-urgent after hour calls to my cell phone will be returned in 24-48 business hours.

I understand and agree to all of the above.

Client Signature Date

Parent or Legal Guardian Signature (if child under 12) Date

Therapist Signature Date