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Consent for Treatment

Description of Services: Psychotherapy may have benefits such as significant reduction in distress, improved social relationships, resolution of specific problems, and clearer understanding of self, values, and goals. However, there are no guarantees about what will happen in therapy. For therapy to be most successful, you will have to be able to talk openly and honestly, address any difficulties that arise, and put forth active effort outside our sessions. Psychotherapy may also require revealing unpleasant aspects of your history and current life. As changes occur, it may affect your life and relationships. During the initial months, things may feel “worse” before they can get better. Conversely, your life may feel much better as the crisis subsides, but long-term changes require life pattern changes that go beyond the crisis. The first couple of sessions are a time to get to know each other and determine whether it will be a good “fit.” If it is determined that a different therapist may be more beneficial, referrals can be provided to you.

Sessions and Fees: The first meeting is an intake session and the frequency of sessions will be determined during this time, according to your needs. Sessions are 50 minutes in duration, usually once a week. Once an appointment is scheduled, that time is reserved exclusively for you and if you need to cancel please do so no less than 24 hours in advance, otherwise it will be considered a missed session. Missed sessions will be charged at 50% of cost, and insurance companies will not pay for missed sessions. Session fee is \$130-160. Payment is received at the start of each session. Overdue accounts for more than 30 days may be sent to a collection agency or secured through other legal means. In most cases, the only information I would be providing would be a client name, nature of services provided, and amount due.

Insurance Reimbursement: If you have a health benefits policy, it will usually provide some mental health coverage. However, you, not your insurance company, are responsible for full payment of the session fees. Therefore, it is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers. Many insurance companies are oriented towards a short-term treatment approach, and, therefore, it may be necessary to seek additional approval from your insurance company after a certain number of sessions. Some plans will allow us to continue; while others will not once your short-term benefits are no longer available. If this is the case, I will provide you with names of other providers who could continue to provide services to you, should you decide not to continue treatment.

Please be aware that most insurance agreements require you to authorize me to provide a clinical diagnosis, and sometimes additional clinical information such as treatment plan or summary, or in rare cases, a copy of the entire record. This information will become part of the insurance company’s files, and in all probability, some of it will be computerized. All insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, but once it’s in their hands, I will have no control over what they do with it. In some cases, they may share the information with a national medical information data bank.

Contact: I am often not immediately available by telephone because I may be in session with another client or otherwise unavailable. My office phone is a cellular phone, which is usually NOT carried with me and is often stationary. Though cellular phones are considered relatively confidential, conversations should be kept to a minimum used only to set or reschedule appointments. If your call is a life-threatening emergency, you should call 911, your family physician and or schedule a more immediate appointment in order to address your concerns. My voicemail is checked regularly and is almost always available for you to leave a message. Every effort will be made to return your call on the same day you make it with the exception of weekends and holidays. When you call, please leave some times and phone numbers where you can best be reached. If I will be unavailable for an extended period of time, I will provide you with the name of a trusted colleague whom you can contact if necessary. With respect to electronic mail (e-mail), please be aware that e-mail is not a confidential means of communication. Therefore, e-mail is no the appropriate way to communicate confidential information.

Professional Records: Both law and the standards of my profession require that I keep appropriate treatment records. You are entitled to review a copy of the records, unless I believe seeing them would be emotionally damaging, in which case I will be happy to provide them to an appropriate mental health professional of your choice. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted or upsetting, so I recommend that we review them together so that we can discuss what they contain. I can also prepare an appropriate summary for review. Clients will be charged an appropriate fee for any preparation time that is required to comply with an information request.

Confidentiality: Confidentiality is the cornerstone of mental health treatment and is protected by the law. I can only release information about our work to others with your written permission. Some basic information about diagnosis and treatment may be required as a condition of your insurance coverage. Exceptions to confidentiality where disclosure is required by law are:

- Harm to others- If there is threat of serious bodily harm to others, I am required to take protective actions, which may include notifying the potential victim, notifying the police, or seeking appropriate hospitalization.
- Harm to self- If there is threat to harm yourself, I am required to seek hospitalization for you, or to contact family members or others who can provide protection.
- Child/Elder/Dependent Adult Abuse- If there is an indication of abuse to a child, an elderly person, or a disabled person, even if it is about a party other than yourself, I must file a report with the appropriate state agency.
- Court- if you are involved in judicial proceedings, you have the right to prevent me from providing any information about your treatment. However, in some circumstances in which your emotional condition is an important element, a judge may require my testimony.
- If due to mental illness you are unable to meet your basic needs, such as clothing, food and shelter, I may have to disclose information in order to access services to provide for your basic needs.

These situations have rarely arisen in my clinical practice, but should such situations occur, I will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action. I may occasionally find it helpful to consult with other professionals. In these circumstances, I will make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of my client. The consultant is also legally bound to keep the information confidential.

Practice Status: I work in an office with a group of independent mental health/medical professionals. While the members share an office space, I want you to know that I am completely independent in providing you with clinical services and I alone am fully responsible for those services. My professional records are separately maintained and no member of the group can have access to them without your specific, written permission.

Minors & Parents: Clients under 18 years of age who are not emancipated can consent to psychological services subject to the involvement of their parent or guardian unless the therapist determines that their involvement would be inappropriate. A client over 12 years of age may consent to psychological services on his/her own, if he or she is mature enough to participate intelligently in such services, and the minor client either would present a danger of serious physical or mental harm to him or herself or others, or is the alleged victim of incest or child abuse. In addition, clients over 12 years of age may consent to alcohol and drug treatment in some circumstances. However, unemancipated patients under 18 years of age and their parents should be aware that the law may allow parents to examine their child's treatment records unless the therapist determines that access would have a detrimental effect on the professional relationship with the client, or to his or her physical safety or psychological well-being. Because privacy in psychotherapy is often crucial to successful progress, particularly with teenagers, and parental involvement, is also essential, it is usually our policy to request an agreement with minors (over 12 years of age) and their parents about access to information. This agreement provides that during treatment, the therapist will provide parents with only general information about the progress of the treatment, and the client's attendance at scheduled sessions. The therapist will also provide parents with a summary of their child's treatment. Any other communication will require the child's authorization, unless the therapist believes that the child is in danger or is a danger to someone else, in which case, the therapist will notify the parents of his or her concern. Before giving the parents any information, the therapist will discuss the matter with the child, if possible, and try to handle any objections he or she might have.