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### **OUTPATIENT SERVICES CONTRACT**

Welcome to my practice. This document contains information about my professional services and business policies. Please read it carefully and jot down any questions that you might have so that we can discuss them at our next meeting. Once you sign 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 both the therapist and the patient and the particular problem which the patient brings. There are a number of different approaches which 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 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 also been shown to have benefits for people who undertake it. Therapy often leads to a significant reduction in feelings of distress, better relationships, and resolution of specific problems. But there are no guarantees about what will happen.

Our first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, I will be able to offer you some initial impressions of what our work will include and an initial 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 questions about my procedures, we should discuss them whenever they arise. If your doubt persists, I 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 from 2 to 4 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 at a mutually agreed time, although sometimes sessions will be longer or more frequent. Once this appointment hour is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide *24 hours advance notice of cancellation* or unless we both agree that you were unable to attend due to circumstances beyond your control.

### **MARITAL THERAPY**

When entering marital therapy, it is important to create and preserve a counseling environment where parties concerned can feel free to participate and disclose; knowing that what is divulged will not be used against them in a court of law. Towards that end, clients participating in marital therapy with me will be required to sign an agreement stating that what is said and/or disclosed during the counseling session(s) is not to be repeated or discussed with their lawyer(s) and/or legal representative(s) (present, past, or future) or in a court of law without the joint written consent of the clients involved in the treatment. This agreement is to be binding whether or not there is a legal dissolution of the marital relationship. Furthermore, it is to be agreed that that the clients participating in the marital therapy or any of their legal representative(s) will not subpoena me to testify in court or in any part of legal proceedings involving material disclosed as a result of counseling sessions nor ask for a statement or report (verbal or written) of said material from me. This agreement is to be binding even after either or both spouses terminate treatment with me.

### **PROFESSIONAL FEES**

My fee is \$250.00 per 50-minute session and \$275.00 per 60-minute session. It is my practice to charge \$275.00 per hour (60 minutes) on a prorated basis for other professional services you require such as report writing, telephone conversations which last longer than 10 minutes, attendance at meetings or consultations with other professionals which you have authorized, preparation of records or treatment summaries, or the time to perform any other services 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 even if I am compelled to testify by another party. Because of the complexity and difficulty of legal involvement, I charge \$275.00 per hour for preparation for and attendance at any legal proceeding.

### **BILLING AND PAYMENT**

You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to at the time these services are requested. In circumstances of unusual financial hardship, I may be willing to negotiate a fee adjustment.

If your account is more than 60 days in arrears and suitable arrangements for payment have not been agreed to, I have the option of using legal means to secure payment, including collection agencies or small claims court. If such legal action is necessary, the cost of bringing that proceeding will be included in the claim. In most cases, the only information which I release about a client's treatment would be the client's name, the nature of the services 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. I am not a participating panel provider for any private insurance. If you have a health insurance policy, it may 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 as appropriate. However, you, and not your insurance company, are 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 try to assist you in deciphering the information you receive from your carrier. If necessary to resolve confusion, I am willing to call the carrier on your behalf.

The escalation of the cost of health care has resulted in an increasing level of complexity about insurance benefits which sometimes makes it difficult to determine exactly how much mental health coverage is available. "Managed Health Care Plans" such as HMOs and PPOs often require advance authorization before they will provide reimbursement for mental health services. These plans are often oriented towards a short-term treatment approach designed to resolve specific problems that are interfering with one's usual level of functioning. It may be necessary to seek additional approval after a certain number of sessions. In my experience, while quite a lot can be accomplished in short term therapy, many clients feel that more services are necessary after insurance benefits expire.

You should also be aware that most insurance agreements require you to authorize me to provide a clinical diagnosis, and sometimes additional information such as a treatment plan or summary, or in rare cases, a copy of the entire record. This information will become part of the insurance company files, and, in all probability, some or all of it will be computerized. 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 of any report which I submit.

Once we have all of the information about your insurance coverage, we will discuss what we can expect to accomplish with the benefits that are available and what will happen if the insurance 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. While I am usually in my office Monday through Thursday, I usually will not answer the phone when I am with a client. When I am unavailable, my telephone is answered by voice mail, which I monitor frequently. I will make every effort to return your call on the same day you make it with the exception of weekends and holidays. If you are difficult to reach, please leave some times when you will be available. If you cannot reach me, and you feel that you cannot wait for me to return your call, you should call your family physician, the emergency room at the nearest hospital and ask for the psychologist or psychiatrist on call, or 911 in case of an emergency. If I am unavailable for an extended time (e.g. when on vacation), I will provide you with the name of a trusted colleague whom you can contact if necessary.

### **PROFESSIONAL RECORDS**

As I am sure that you are aware, I am required to keep appropriate records of the professional services I provide. Because these records contain information which can be misinterpreted by someone who is not a mental health professional, it is my general policy that clients not review them. However, if you request, I will provide you with a treatment summary unless I believe that to do so would be emotionally damaging. If that is the case, I will be happy to forward the summary to another appropriate mental health professional who is working with you or speak with them about you (with the proper written authorization). You should be aware that this will be treated in the same manner as any other professional/clinical service and you will be billed accordingly.

### **MINORS**

If you are under eighteen 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 the 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 that there is a high risk that you will seriously harm yourself or another, in which case I will notify them of my concerns. 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, there are a number of exceptions.

In most judicial proceedings, you have the right to prevent me from providing any information about your treatment. However, in some circumstances such as child custody proceedings and proceedings in which your emotional condition is an important element,

a judge may require my testimony if he/she determines that resolution of the issues before him/her demands it.

There are some situations in which I am legally required to take action to protect others from harm, even though that requires revealing some information about a client's treatment. For example, if I believe that a child, an elderly person, or a disabled person is being abused, I must file a report with the appropriate state agency.

If I believe that a client is threatening serious bodily harm to another, I am required to take protective actions, which may include notifying the potential victim, notifying the police, or seeking appropriate hospitalization. If a client threatens to harm him/herself, I may be required to seek hospitalization for the client, or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.

These situations have rarely arisen in my practice. Should such a situation occur, I will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action.

I may occasionally find it helpful to consult about a case with other professionals. In these consultations, I make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of my client. The consultant is, of course, also legally bound to keep the information confidential. Unless you object, I will not tell you about the consultations unless I feel that it is important to our work together.

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 and I am not an attorney. While I am happy to discuss these issues with you, should you need specific advice, formal legal consultation may be desirable.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and agreed to abide by its terms during our professional relationship. Please sign & print name underneath.

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Date Signed: \_\_\_\_\_