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Privacy Practices

Welcome to my practice of psychotherapy.

This document contains important information about my professional service and business policies. Please read it carefully and make note of any questions you might have so that we can discuss them at our next meeting.

Psychological Services:

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the therapist, the patient, and the particular problems or issues you bring forward. There are many different methods I may use to deal with the issues that you hope to address. Psychotherapy is not like a doctor visit. Instead, it calls for a very active effort on your part. In order for the therapy to be most successful, you will have to work on things we talk about both during our sessions and at home.

Psychotherapy can have its benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. On the other hand, psychotherapy has also been shown to have benefits for people who go through it. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. There are no guarantees of what you will experience.

One session or a few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, I will be able to offer you some first impressions of what our work will include and treatment goals, if you decide to continue with therapy. You should evaluate this information along with your own opinions of 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 doubts persist, I will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.

Meetings:

If, after our initial evaluation, you decide you would like to proceed with therapy, I will usually schedule one 50-minute session per week at a time we agree on, although we may schedule meetings more or less frequently according to your needs. Once an appointment is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide 24 hours advance notice of cancellation or we both agree that you were unable to attend due to circumstances beyond your control. I will do my best to reschedule your appointment.

Professional Fees:

My hourly session fee is \$100. In addition to weekly appointments, I charge this amount for other professional services you may need, though I will break down the hourly cost if I work for periods of less than one hour. Other services include report writing, telephone conversations lasting longer than 10 minutes, attendance at meetings with other professionals you have authorized, preparation of records or treatment summaries, and the time spent performing any other service you may request of me. If you become involved in any legal proceedings that require my participation, you will be expected to pay for my professional time even if I am called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement, I charge \$300 per hour for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding.

Billing and Payments:

You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise or unless you have insurance coverage which requires another agreement. Any other arrangement must be discussed with me.

Insurance Reimbursement:

In order for us to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate what resources you have available to pay for your treatment. If you have a health insurance policy, it sometimes provides some coverage for mental health treatment.

You should carefully read the section regarding mental health services provided by your insurance company. If you have specific questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. I will provide you with whatever information I can based on my experience and will be happy to help you in understanding the information you receive from your insurance company.

Due to the rising costs of health care, insurance benefits have become increasingly more complex. It is sometimes difficult to determine exactly how much mental health coverage is available. "Managed Health Care" plans often require authorization before they provide reimbursement for mental health services. These plans are often limited to short-term treatment approaches designed to work out specific problems that interfere with a person's usual level of functioning. It may be necessary to seek approval for more therapy after a certain number of sessions. While a lot can be accomplished in short-term therapy, some clients feel that they need more services after insurance benefits end.

Insurance companies require me to provide them with a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes I have to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or in rare cases, copies of the entire record. This information will become part of the insurance company files. Though all insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, I have no control over what they do with it once it is in their possession. It is important to remember that you always have the right to pay for my services yourself without involving insurance to avoid the problems described above.

Contacting Me

I am often not immediately available. While I am usually in my office during normal business hours, I will not answer any phone calls or texts when I am with a client. During business hours, I check my confidential voicemail every hour and return your call as soon as I am able. I make every effort to return all calls the same day with the exception of weekends and holidays. If you are having a serious emergency that cannot wait, you will need to dial 9-1-1, your primary care doctor, go to the nearest emergency room, or call the 24-hour crisis line at 800-320-1616. If I am unavailable for an extended period of time, I will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact.

Minors

If you are under eighteen years of age, please be aware that the law may provide your parents the right to examine your treatment records. It is my policy to request an agreement from parents that they allow the therapist to provide the information verbally which the therapist deems most helpful to you and your family functioning. Before giving them any information, I will discuss the matter with you.

Confidentiality

In general, the privacy of all communications between a patient and a Marriage and Family Therapist is protected by law, and I can only release information about our work to others with your written permission. But there are a few exceptions. In most legal proceedings, you have the right to prevent me from providing any information about your treatment. In some proceedings involving child custody and those in which your emotional condition is an important issue, a judge may order my written or verbal testimony if he/she determines that the issues demand it.

There are some situations in which I am legally obligated to take action to protect others from harm, even if I have to reveal some information about a patient's treatment. For example, that a child, elderly person, or disabled person is being abused I must file a report with the appropriate agency or agencies.

If I believe that a patient is threatening serious bodily harm to another, I am required to take protective actions. These actions may include notifying a potential victim, contacting the police, or seeking hospitalization for the client. If the client threatens to harm themselves, I may be obligated to seek hospitalization for them, to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.

These situations rarely occur in my practice. If a similar situation occurs, I will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action.

I may occasionally find it helpful to consult other professionals about a case. During a consultation, I make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of my patient. The consultant is also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you don't object, I will not tell you about these consultations unless I feel that it is important to our work together.