

CONSENT TO TREATMENT

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Welcome to my practice. This document contains important information about my professional services and business policies. Please read it carefully and jot down any questions you might have so that we can discuss them at our next meeting. Signing this document indicates your consent to treatment under the conditions specified here.

SERVICES

Psychotherapy or psychological counseling is not easily described in general statements. Usually, it involves identifying and attempting to change particular patterns of thinking or behaving which are causing you emotional distress, or which are causing you difficulties in your relationships with others. It may involve learning new coping techniques, or new communication skills. When appropriate, I often teach patients self-hypnosis to help them overcome destructive patterns of thinking or behaving, or for anxiety management. There are other methods as well which therapists use to help individuals or families deal with problems. To some extent, the particular techniques employed or the pace of therapy depends on the personalities of the patient and even the therapist. Whatever methods are employed, psychotherapy is not like being treated by a family physician or other medical doctor. 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 the issues discussed by trying out new ways of thinking or behaving, at home, at work or both.

Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, embarrassment, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. At the very least, therapy is painful because it means acknowledging and facing up to problems. On the other hand, therapy usually leads to significant reductions in feelings of distress, such as depression, anxiety or guilt, and to better marital and family relationships. Certain psychological therapies have been shown to be as effective as medication at treating psychiatric disorders such as depression and various anxiety disorders, and typically both are used in combination. But since each person is unique, there are no guarantees of what you as an individual will experience, or what specific outcome you will have. In a very few cases, just as with any routine medical intervention, some patients have gotten worse.

Your first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your symptoms and other concerns. By the end of the evaluation, your therapist will be able to make a diagnosis, and offer you some first impressions of what the focus of your therapy will be, and a general plan for further treatment. When you first begin therapy, you should schedule one 45 to 50-minute session every week or every two weeks, unless your therapist discusses other arrangements with you in your first session. Since we are usually busy, it is a good idea to schedule several sessions in advance. It is important that you keep your scheduled appointments for you to obtain maximum benefit from the psychotherapy.

MARRIAGE AND FAMILY SERVICES

While most health insurance policies do not reimburse for marriage counseling, many do reimburse for family/couple therapy. In such cases there must be a single identified patient with a diagnosis reflecting a mental or emotional problem, such as depression or anxiety. Couple or family sessions are indicated when it appears that the patient's mental or emotional problems are occurring within the context of marital or family conflict, or when couple or family sessions are judged to be the most efficient treatment option. These policies are in keeping with the "medical model" under which insurance benefits are paid. It is my policy to bill insurance for couple/family therapy only when there is a legitimate diagnosable condition related to marital or family conflict. When this is not the case, couple/family therapy must be paid for out of pocket.

Actually, significant marital or family conflict often is the result of dysfunctional behavioral or communication patterns that have evolved within the family, that involve more than one family member, and that have become habitual. In some sense, therefore, the relationship, rather than a particular individual, is the focus of the intervention. While it is necessary for insurance purposes to have a single identified patient, it is usually my policy to view all participants in ongoing couple/family therapy as patients or clients. It is usually inappropriate for individuals participating in a couple/family therapy to view the identified patient as somehow more responsible for conflict or as more dysfunctional. If you have questions about how marital or family sessions are to be billed, please feel free to ask me at your earliest convenience.

OUR PRACTICE

Although I am an independent practitioner, I share office space with a multi-specialty group of psychologists and social workers. Although we are separate business entities, we have chosen to operate out of the same office suite because of our close collegial relationship, and because we feel that you are best served by having each of these disciplines available and working together.

If you have questions about any aspect of your treatment, you should discuss them with me at your first opportunity. If your doubts persist, I will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.

You should know that some physical illnesses can produce mental or emotional symptoms which mimic or seem like psychiatric disorders. If I suspect that your symptoms may be caused by a physical illness, I will refer you to a physician, typically your family physician or the referring physician, for an evaluation. However, because psychologists and social workers are not physicians, diagnosing physical illnesses, or prescribing medications are outside of the scope of their professional practice. If you suspect that your symptoms are caused by a physical illness or condition, you should consult your family physician immediately.

PROFESSIONAL FEES

Our fees depend on the specific service you are receiving. Individual, marriage or family counseling, psychological testing, and preparation of records for third parties are charged at different rates. You have a right to know the costs you are incurring before you incur them, so please do not hesitate to request information from me during our regular visits.

If you become involved in legal proceedings that require my participation, you will be expected to pay for all of my professional time, including preparation and transportation costs, and time spent waiting to testify, even if I am called by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement, professional time spent in preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding is charged at a higher rate than other services. I will be glad to discuss my fees for such services with you if you anticipate the need arising. Please note: I do not do custody evaluations for divorce proceedings. Such evaluations involve considerably more than providing therapy to a dependent child or to one or both parents. If subpoenaed, my position will be that I cannot render an expert opinion about custody since I have not and will not conduct a custody evaluation.

If you do find it necessary to cancel an appointment, you must provide 24 hours notice or you will be charged a fee of \$55. You should note that a late cancellation or no show fee is typically not reimbursed by insurance companies. This fee will be waived if we both agree that you were unable to attend due to circumstances beyond your control, such as illness or a death in the family. But regardless of the late cancellation fees, you will obtain maximum benefit from counseling only if you attend regularly.

PAYMENTS

You will be expected to remit your portion of the charges (your deductible and/or copay) at the beginning of each session. If you do accrue a balance, you must make regular monthly payments of one-third (1/3) the outstanding balance. Sometimes other fee arrangements may be made under special circumstances, but such arrangements must be agreed to by both of us before they are implemented.

If your account is more than 60 days in arrears, we reserve the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may involve utilizing a collection agency, in which case, the only information we release to the collection agency is the patient's name and identifying information, the nature of services provided, and the amount due. Failure to pay the agreed upon fee in a timely manner is a breach of our therapeutic contract, and may result in the termination of that contract.

INSURANCE REIMBURSEMENT

If you have a health insurance policy, it will usually provide some coverage for mental health treatment. If your plan is one in which I participate as a paneled provider, then usually we will bill your insurance company directly for your treatment, less the deductible and copay which we will collect from you. You should check with your insurance company to see if I am on your panel of providers. If I am not a paneled provider with your insurance company, then we will fill out forms and provide you with whatever assistance we can in helping you receive the benefits to which you are entitled.

You should carefully read the section in your insurance coverage booklet that describes mental health services. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. Please keep in mind that you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of our fees. It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

CONTACTING ME

I am usually not immediately available by telephone. I do not take calls when I am with other patients. When I am unavailable, my telephone is answered by a voice mail system, and you are given the opportunity to leave a message. Please leave specific instructions as to when and how you can best be reached. I return calls several times per day during my regular business hours.

If you are having a real emergency or feel you are not safe, please proceed immediately to the nearest emergency room and ask for the psychiatrist on call. Also please do not hesitate to call me and leave a message outside of my business hours. I do not provide 24 hour on call services for emergencies, but I will nevertheless respond as soon as I am aware of your difficulties.

Please note: we cannot return calls to numbers that do not accept "ID blocked" calls.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The law protects the privacy of all communications between a patient and a mental health professional. When you first begin treatment, you will be given a notice of our privacy policies (entitled "Notice of Policies and Practices to Protect the Privacy of Your Health Information"), and asked to sign an acknowledgement of receipt.

Please read both documents carefully. The confidentiality of your protected health information is of the highest priority to us, and you should be aware of the conditions under which such information is released.

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Your signature on this page indicates that you have been given a copy of this document, and are accepting responsibility for reading it. Unless you notify me otherwise, your continued participation in therapy assumes that you accept the terms and conditions of this document and agree to abide by it.

Patient

Date

Patient's Parent or Guardian