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Information for Clients

Welcome to my practice. I appreciate your giving me the opportunity to be of help to you.

This handout answers some questions clients often ask about any therapy practice. It is important to me that you know how we will work together. I believe our work will be most helpful to you when you have a clear idea of what we are trying to do.

This handout talks about the following in a general way:

- What the risks and benefits of therapy are.
- What the goals of therapy are, and what my methods of treatment are like.
- How long therapy might take.
- How much my services cost, and how I handle money matters.
- Other important areas of our relationship.

About Psychotherapy

Because you will be putting a good deal of time, money, and energy into therapy, you should choose a therapist carefully. I strongly believe you should feel comfortable with the therapist you choose, and hopeful about the therapy. When you feel this way, therapy is more likely to be very helpful to you.

My theoretical approach is based on cognitive behavioral therapy, which proposes that our interpersonal and emotional difficulties stem from distorted, dysfunctional, or irrational thinking. This unhealthy thinking influences our mood and behavior in a negative way. The goal in therapy is to learn to recognize and change unhealthy or negative thinking that then leads to improvement in mood and behavior.

By the end of our first or second session, I will tell you how I see your case at this point and how I think we should proceed. I view therapy as a partnership between us. You define the problem areas to be worked on; I use some special knowledge to help you make the changes you want to make. Psychotherapy is not like visiting a medical doctor. It requires your very active involvement. It requires your best efforts to change thoughts, feelings, and behaviors.

I expect us to plan our work together. In our treatment plan we will list the areas to work on, our goals, the methods we will use, the time and money commitments we will make, and some other things. If we think we need to, we can then change our treatment plan, its goals, and its methods. An important part of your therapy will be practicing new skills that you will learn in our sessions. I will ask you to practice outside our meetings. Change will sometimes be easy and quick, but more often it will be slow and frustrating, and you will need to keep trying. There are no instant, painless cures and no “magic pills.” However, you *can* learn new ways of looking at your problems that will be very helpful for changing your feelings and reactions.

Most of my clients see me once a week for several weeks. After that, we meet less often for several more months. Therapy then usually comes to an end. Stopping therapy should not be done casually, although either of us may decide to end it if we believe it is in your best interest. If you wish to stop therapy at any time, I ask that you agree now to meet then for at least one session to review our work together. We will review our goals, the work we have done, any future work that needs to be done, and our choices. If you would like to take a “time out” from therapy to try it on your own, we should discuss this.

The Benefits and Risks of Therapy

As with any treatment, there are some risks as well as many benefits with therapy. You should think about both the benefits and risks when making any treatment decisions. For example, in therapy, there is a risk that clients will, for a time, have uncomfortable levels of sadness, guilt, anxiety, anger, frustration, loneliness, helplessness, or other negative feelings. Clients may recall unpleasant memories. These feelings or memories may bother a client at work or in school. In addition, some people in your community may mistakenly view anyone in therapy as weak, or perhaps as seriously disturbed. Also, clients in therapy may have problems with people important to them. Family secrets may be told. Therapy may disrupt a marital relationship. Sometimes, too, a client’s problems may temporarily worsen after the beginning of treatment. Most of these risks are to be expected when people are making important changes in their lives. Finally, even with our best efforts, there is a risk that therapy may not work out well for you.

While you consider these risks, you should know also that the benefits of therapy have been shown by scientists in hundreds of well-designed research studies. People who are depressed may find their mood lifting. Others may no longer feel afraid, angry, or anxious. In therapy, people have a chance to talk things out fully until their feelings are relieved or the problems are solved. Clients’ relationships and coping skills may improve greatly. They may get more satisfaction out of social and family relationships. Their personal goals and values may become clearer. They may grow in many directions—as persons, in their close relationships, in their work or schooling, and in the ability to enjoy their lives. I do not take on clients I do not think I can help. Therefore, I will enter our relationship with optimism about our progress.

Consultations

If you could benefit from a treatment I cannot provide, I will help you to get it. You have a right to ask me about such other treatments, their risks, and their benefits. Based on what I learn about your problems, I may recommend a medical exam or use of medication. If I do this, I will fully discuss my reasons with you, so that you can decide what is best. If you are treated by another professional, I will coordinate my services with them and with your own medical doctor.

If for some reason treatment is not going well, I might suggest you see another therapist or another professional in addition to me. As a responsible person and ethical therapist, I cannot continue to treat you if my treatment is not working for you. If you wish for another professional’s opinion at any time, or wish to talk with another therapist, I will help you find a qualified person and will provide him or her with the information needed.

What to Expect from Our Relationship

As a professional, I will use my best knowledge and skills to help you. This includes following the standards of the Georgia Composite Board of Professional Counselors, Marriage and Family Therapist and Social Workers. In your best interests, our code of ethics puts limits on the relationship between a therapist and a

client, and I will abide by these. Let me explain these limits, so you will not think they are personal responses to you. First, I am licensed and trained to practice professional counseling—not law, medicine, finance, or any other profession. I am not able to give you good advice from these other professional viewpoints. Second, state laws and our code of ethics require me to keep what you tell me confidential (that is, private). You can trust me not to tell anyone else what you tell me, except in certain limited situations. (Explained in the *HIPAA Notice Privacy Practices*.) Here I want to explain that I try not to reveal who my clients are. This is part of my effort to maintain your privacy. If we meet on the street or socially, I may not say hello or talk to you very much. My behavior will not be a personal reaction to you, but a way to maintain the confidentiality of our relationship. Third, in your best interest, and following the code of ethics, I can only be your therapist. I cannot have any other role in your life. I cannot, now or ever, be a close friend or socialize with any of my clients. I cannot be a therapist to someone who is already a friend. I can never have a sexual or romantic relationship with any client during, or after, the course of therapy. I cannot have a business relationship with any of my clients, other than the therapy relationship.

About Confidentiality

I will treat with great care all the information you share with me. It is your legal right that our sessions and my records about you be kept private. That is why I ask you to sign a “release-of-records” form before I can talk about you or send my records about you to anyone else. In general, I will tell no one what you tell me. I will not even reveal that you are receiving treatment from me. In all but a few rare situations, your confidentiality (that is, your privacy) is protected by state law and by the rules of my profession. The details are outlined on the *HIPAA notice of Privacy Practices* that you have received.

There are two situations in which I might talk about part of your case with another therapist. I ask now for your understanding and agreement to let me do so in these two situations. First, when I am away from the office for a few days, I have a trusted fellow therapist “cover” for me. This therapist will be available to you in emergencies. Of course, this therapist is bound by the same laws and rules as I am to protect your confidentiality. Second, I sometimes consult other therapists or other professionals about my clients. This helps me in giving high-quality treatment. These persons are also required to keep your information private. Your name will never be given to them, and they will be told only as much as they need to know to understand your situation. If I must discontinue our relationship because of illness, disability, or other presently unforeseen circumstances, I ask you to agree to my transferring your records to another therapist who will assure their confidentiality, preservation, and appropriate access. Except for the situations I have described above, I will always maintain your privacy. I also ask you not to disclose the name or identity of any other client being seen in this office.

About Our Appointments

The very first time I meet with you, we will need to give each other much basic information. We will usually meet for a 50-60 minute session once a week, then less often. We can schedule meetings for both your and my convenience. I will tell you at least a month in advance of my vacations or any other times we cannot meet.

You will be charged \$50 no-fee for sessions cancelled with less than 24 hours’ notice, for other than the most serious reasons. Insurance will not cover this charge.

Fees, Payments, and Billing

My current regular fees are as follows. You will be given advance notice if my fees should change.

Regular therapy services: For a session of 50 minutes, the fee is \$90. (60 minutes for \$100) I suggest you make out your check before each session begins, so that our time will be used best. Other payment or fee arrangements must be worked out before the end of our first meeting. Client not using insurance and paying in full at time of service by check or cash will receive a 12% discount off the 50 minute fee (\$80). Payments made with credit cards will not receive this discount. Those with insurance coverage are expected to pay the co-payment or co-insurance at the time of service. If your insurance coverage is rejected, then you will be responsible for the full fee. You should call your insurance company prior to our first session to verify benefits including my in-network participation, determine co-pay amounts, and get information on deductibles, prior authorization or the need for a doctor's referral.

Telephone consultations: I believe that telephone consultations may be suitable or even needed at times in our therapy. If so, I will charge you our regular fee, prorated over the time needed. If I need to have long telephone conferences with other professionals as part of your treatment, you will be billed for these at the same rate as for regular therapy services. If you are concerned about all this, please be sure to discuss it with me in advance so we can set a policy that is comfortable for both of us. Of course, there is no charge for calls about appointments or similar business. Insurance companies will not cover telephone consultations.

Extended sessions: Occasionally it may be better to go on with a session, rather than stop or postpone work on a particular issue. When this extension is more than 10 minutes, I will tell you, because sessions that are extended beyond 10 minutes will be charged on a prorated basis.

Reports: I will not charge you for my time spent making routine reports to your insurance company. However, I will have to bill you for any extra-long or complex reports the company might require. The company will not cover this fee.

Other services: Charges for other services, such as hospital visits, consultations with other therapists, home visits, or any court-related services (such as consultations with lawyers, depositions, or attendance at courtroom proceedings) will be based on the time involved in providing the service at my regular fee schedule. Some services may require payment in advance.

If you think you may have trouble paying your bills on time, please discuss this with me. If you get behind more than the cost of two sessions, I will notify you by mail. If it then remains unpaid, I must stop therapy with you. Fees that continue unpaid after this will be turned over to small-claims court or a collection service.

If there is any problem with my charges, my billing, your insurance, or any other money-related point, please bring it to my attention. I will do the same with you. Such problems can interfere greatly with our work. They must be worked out openly and quickly.

If You Need to Contact Me

I cannot promise that I will be available at all times. Although I am in the office during working hours and many evenings, I do not take phone calls when I am with a client. You can always leave a message my answering service, and I will return your call as soon as I can. Generally, I will return messages within 24 hours.

If you have an after hours emergency or crisis, I can be reached by calling (912) 660-8254. If you have a behavioral or emotional crisis and cannot reach me, you or your family members should call the mental health crisis line at (800) 715-4225, or go to the nearest hospital emergency room.

If I Need to Contact Someone about You

If there is an emergency during our work together, or I become concerned about your personal safety, I am required by law and by the rules of my profession to contact someone close to you—perhaps a relative, spouse, or close friend. I am also required to contact this person, or the authorities, if I become concerned about your harming someone else. Please write down the name and information of your chosen contact person in the blanks provided:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____ Relationship to you: _____

Statement of Principles and Complaint Procedures

It is my intention to fully abide by all the rules of the Georgia Composite Board of Professional Counselors, Marriage and Family Therapist and Social Workers. Problems can arise in our relationship, just as in any other relationship. If you are not satisfied with any area of our work, please raise your concerns with me at once. I will make every effort to hear any complaints you have and to seek solutions to them. If you feel that I, or any other therapist, has treated you unfairly or has even broken a professional rule, please tell me. You can also contact the Georgia Secretary of State. A representative can help clarify your concerns or tell you how to file a complaint.

In my practice as a therapist, I do not discriminate against clients because of any of these factors: age, sex, marital/family status, race, color, religious beliefs, ethnic origin, place of residence, veteran status, physical disability, health status, sexual orientation, or criminal record unrelated to present dangerousness. I will always take steps to advance and support the values of equal opportunity, human dignity, and racial/ethnic/cultural diversity. If you believe you have been discriminated against, please bring this matter to my attention immediately.

Our Agreement

I, the client (or his or her parent or guardian), understand I have the right not to sign this form. My signature below indicates that I have read and discussed this agreement; it does not indicate that I am waiving any of my rights. I understand I can choose to discuss my concerns with you, the therapist, before I start (or the client starts) formal therapy. I also understand that any of the points mentioned above can be

discussed and may be open to change. If at any time during the treatment I have questions about any of the subjects discussed in this handout, I can talk with you about them, and you will do your best to answer them.

I understand that after therapy begins I have the right to withdraw my consent to therapy at any time, for any reason. However, I will make every effort to discuss my concerns about my progress with you before ending therapy with you.

I understand that no specific promises have been made to me by this therapist about the results of treatment, the effectiveness of the procedures used by this therapist, or the number of sessions necessary for therapy to be effective.

I understand that electronic methods of communication (text, email, and voicemail) are not secure and could increase the risk of a confidentiality breach. I understand that these methods are best used to expedite scheduling and administrative issues, not to share personal/private health information. If I chose to use these methods to communicate private health information, I do so at my own risk.

I have read, or have had read to me, the issues and points in this handout. I have discussed those points I did not understand, and have had my questions, if any, fully answered. I agree to act according to the points covered in this brochure. I hereby agree to enter into therapy with this therapist (or to have the client enter therapy), and to cooperate fully and to the best of my ability, as shown by my signature here. My signature below also indicates that I have been given a copy of the HIPAA Notice of Privacy Practices. My signature authorizes the release of information necessary to process health insurance claims and authorizes the payment of health benefits directly to the provider.

Signature of client (or person acting for client)

Date

Printed name

Relationship to client:

Self

Parent

Legal guardian

I, the therapist, have met with this client (and/or his or her parent or guardian) for a suitable period of time, and have informed him or her of the issues and points raised in this handout. I have responded to all of his or her questions. I believe this person fully understands the issues, and I find no reason to believe this person is not fully competent to give informed consent to treatment. I agree to enter into therapy with the client, as shown by my signature here.

Signature of Therapist

Date