

Center for Anxiety & Social Intervention

*Evidence-based psychotherapy and assessment
for children, teens, and families*

OUTPATIENT SERVICES CONTRACT

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. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between us.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. Even when providing evidenced-based, research-validated methods, therapy varies depending on the personalities of the psychologist and patient, and the particular problems you bring forward. There are many different methods I may use to deal with the problems that you hope to address. Psychotherapy is not like a medical 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 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. I attempt to employ the therapy methods and techniques that have been shown in scientific research to be the most effective for the problems we have identified. Unfortunately, there are no guarantees of what you will experience.

Our first session (and portions of future sessions) will involve an evaluation of you or your child's needs. By the end of the first session, I usually will be able to offer you some first impressions of what our work will include and a treatment plan to follow, 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. Evidence has shown that the bond between therapist and client is an important predictor of treatment

success, so you should be very careful about the therapist you select. In addition, therapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy. 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

After the first intake session, we can both decide if I am the best person to provide the services you need in order to meet your treatment goals. If psychotherapy is begun, we will usually schedule a series of 45-minute sessions (one appointment hour of 45 minutes duration). Most clients meet once per week, although some cases may require longer or more frequent sessions. Often as therapy progresses we may decide to meet less often as your needs are less immediate. Once a session is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide 24 hours advance notice of cancellation. In the cases of emergencies or if agreed upon together in advance, this cancellation fee is waived.

PROFESSIONAL FEES

My hourly fee is \$250. 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 or school personnel 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 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 and uncertainty of legal involvement, the estimated cost must be paid in advance of my participation.

BILLING AND PAYMENTS

You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise. If payment is not made at the time of service, you will be sent a bill for the full amount. I am willing to negotiate a payment installment plan in most cases. In circumstances of unusual financial hardship, I may be willing to negotiate a sliding fee based on your available financial resources.

If your account has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements for payment have not been agreed upon, I have the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may involve hiring a collection agency or going through small claims court. If such legal action is necessary, its costs will be included in the claim. In most collection situations, the only information I release regarding a patient's treatment is his/her name, the nature of 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 you have available to pay for your treatment. If you have a health insurance policy, it will usually provide some coverage for mental health treatment. While I cannot submit your insurance claim for you, I can attempt to provide you with whatever information you need to submit the claim. I will fill out forms and provide you with whatever assistance I can in helping you receive the benefits to which you are entitled; however, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of my fees. 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 that describes mental health services. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. Of course 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. If it is necessary to clear confusion, I will be willing to call the company on your behalf.

Due to the rising costs of health care, insurance benefits have increasingly become more complex. It is sometimes difficult to determine exactly how much mental health coverage is available. "Managed Health Care" plans such as HMOs and PPOs 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 patients feel that they need more services after insurance benefits end.

You should also be aware that most insurance companies require you to authorize me to provide them with a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes I have to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of the entire record (in very rare cases). This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored in a computer. 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 hands. In some cases, they may share the information with a national medical information databank. I will provide you with a report of any information I submit, if you request it.

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 they 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 to avoid the problems described above.

CONTACTING ME

I am often not immediately available by telephone. Even when I am physically in my office, I am usually on the phone or meeting with a client. However, I am paged by my voicemail system whenever you leave a message and will review your message as soon as I am able. I will make every effort to return your call within one business day of the time you make it, with the exception of weekends and holidays. If you are difficult to reach, please inform me of some times when you will be available. If you are unable to reach me and feel that you can't wait for me to return your call, contact your family physician or the nearest emergency room and ask for the psychologist on call. If I will be unavailable for an extended time, I will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact, if necessary.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDS

The laws and standards of my profession require that I keep treatment records. You are entitled to receive a copy of your records, or I can prepare a summary for you instead. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. If you wish to see your records, I recommend that you review them in my presence so that we can discuss the contents. Patients will be charged an appropriate fee for any professional time spent in responding to information requests.

MINORS

If the identified client is under eighteen years of age, please be aware that the law may allow parents the right to examine a child's treatment records. It is my policy to request an agreement from parents that they agree to give up access to your records, with certain conditions that I will explain. If they agree, I will provide them only with general information about our work together, unless I feel there is a high risk that

you will seriously harm yourself or someone else. In this case, I will notify them of my concern. I will also provide them with a summary of your treatment when it is complete. Before giving them any information, I will discuss the matter with you, if possible, and do my best to handle any objections you may have with what I am prepared to discuss. Often in my work with children and adolescents, parents are actively involved in the therapy process and may request updates frequently which I will provide them in general terms without violating our agreement above.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In general, the privacy of all communications between a patient and a psychologist 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.

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, if I believe that a child, elderly person, or disabled person is being abused or neglected, I may be required to file a report with the appropriate state agency (i.e., Department of Children and Family Services).

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

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 testimony if he/she determines that the issues demand it.

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.

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 that you may have at our next meeting. I will be happy to discuss these issues with you if you need specific advice, but formal legal advice may be needed because the laws governing confidentiality are quite complex, and I am not an attorney. If you request, I will provide you with relevant portions or summaries of the state laws regarding these issues.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and agree to abide by its terms during our professional relationship.

(Signature)

(Date)