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PSYCHOTHERAPY AGREEMENT

Welcome to my practice. Here is some information to help you understand how my therapy works. Please read it carefully. If this Psychotherapy Agreement is acceptable to both of you, please sign the last page. If you have any questions, let's discuss them when we meet.

PSYCHOTHERAPY

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the particular problems the clients bring, the training of the therapist, and the personalities of the clients and the therapist. Psychotherapy requires hard work on your part. In order to be successful, you will have to put a lot of effort into your sessions and the time between sessions.

Psychotherapy has both benefits and risks. Research has shown that two-thirds to three-quarters of clients find their therapy quite helpful. Psychotherapy often leads to a significant reduction of distress, better relationships, and resolution of specific problems. I hope you will also experience better communication, greater success with difficult issues, and a greater sense of teamwork. Unfortunately, since psychotherapy is not an exact science, there can be no guarantees about what your experience will be.

The risks of psychotherapy include feelings of frustration, fear, anger, and sadness. You may have to talk about things that are difficult to discuss. We may need to discuss unpleasant aspects of your situation and your life history. You may have new insights about yourself and others that may feel uncomfortable. You may be asked to make changes in your habitual ways of doing things – and this may feel difficult at first.

STARTING THERAPY

Research has shown that the most important predictor of therapy success is a good working relationship between clients and therapist. For this reason, we should all collaborate to find ways to work well together. I will explain to you my style of therapy and answer any questions you may have about me. Also, if you would like, I will direct you to written materials that describe my approach to couples therapy.

Please let me know what makes you comfortable and uncomfortable. We need to work together to establish good teamwork, just like in any relationship. Since therapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, this is an important task to do well.

I have found that I can help you best if you are each:

- Willing to acknowledge your contribution to the difficulties.
- Willing to make changes in the way you talk and the things you do.

MEETINGS

For couples therapy appointments: if one of you is late, we wait until you are both here. If one of you cannot attend an appointment, it's the same as cancelling that appointment. We will reschedule for a time that works for both of you. I do not meet with either one of you separately when we had scheduled a couples appointment.

CANCELLATIONS AND RESCHEDULING

My cancellation policy has three parts:

1. When any one of us needs to change an appointment, we each agree to give the others as much notice as possible.
2. If you change an appointment with less than 48 hours notice, you will have to pay my full fee for that time (because that time was saved for you).

This policy applies regardless of reason for the cancellation. The only exceptions are: situations that require immediate medical attention, funerals, and deaths in the family. There is no charge in these circumstances. However, there are other circumstances that do result in a charge, even though you had no control over them. These include last-minute business meetings, car breakdowns, minor illnesses, babysitters who don't show up, airplanes that don't arrive on time, and similar difficulties. I empathize with these problems, and sometimes have them myself. Nonetheless, if they cause you to cancel an appointment with less than 48 hours notice, you will have to pay my full fee for that time.

PROBLEMS WITH THERAPY

If you have questions or problems with any part of your therapy or assessment, please bring these to my attention in session as soon as possible. It is essential that we talk about your concerns, explore them and resolve them. Our teamwork – and the success of your therapy – depends on it.

Sometimes, I may be able to modify my procedures so they will work better for you. Sometimes, greater explanation will help you understand why I do certain things and why those things may be helpful. Sometimes, the problem you are having with therapy may be very similar to the problem you are having in your relationship. This can be a perfect opportunity for you to learn, grow and change – although it may feel difficult at the time. You may discover something new about yourself that will help you break-through an important problem in your relationship.

I will consistently encourage you to talk about your concerns, problems and difficulties so we can resolve them. I believe this kind of discussion is crucial in the therapeutic relationship between us – and I believe this kind of discussion is also crucial in your relationship with each other. However, if your doubts, concerns, or problems about therapy persist, I will be glad to refer you to another therapist with whom you may be more comfortable.

FOLLOW-UP AND ONGOING SUPPORT

Usually, couples return periodically for additional sessions until they feel their problems are resolved. When you feel that things are going well on your own, we usually schedule a follow-up meeting or two. Research has shown that the first two years are the time to be concerned about “backsliding.” However, if you can maintain your new improvements for these two years, they are probably yours “for keeps.” Many couples like to keep our couples meetings as a resource whenever they feel the need for support in their relationship. I will be glad to arrange whatever ongoing support would be most helpful to the two of you.

FEES AND PAYMENT

My fees are \$150 per hour.

You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise. If you are unable to afford my fee, please discuss this with me. I may be able to give you referral that will allow you to get the help you need at a price you can afford.

OTHER PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

In the rare instance that you should need professional services other than psychotherapy, it is my practice to charge an hourly fee of \$150.00. Such services might include report writing, lengthy telephone conversations, meetings or consultations, preparation of records and/or treatment summaries. If you should need me to photocopy your records for another professional, the then-current fees from the Official Code of Georgia will be charged.

In the rare circumstance that you become involved in litigation that requires my participation, you will be expected to pay for my professional time, even if I am compelled to testify by another party. Because of the complexity and difficulty of legal involvement, I charge \$150.00 per hour for preparation for any legal

proceeding and \$150 per hour, door-to-door, for attendance at any proceeding. Fees for these services will be agreed upon at the time the services are requested.

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. However, **you (not your insurance company) are ultimately responsible for full payment of fees. Payment is expected at the time of service and if your insurance company denies your claim, you are still responsible for the full self-pay rate.** If you anticipate submitting information to your insurance company, it is very important that you find out exactly which mental health services your insurance company covers.

If you decide to submit claims for reimbursement to your insurance company, you should be aware that your contract with your health insurance company requires that I provide the company with information relevant to the services that I provide to you. I am also required to provide a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes I am required to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of your entire Clinical Record. In such situations, I will make every effort to release only the minimum information about you that is necessary for the purpose requested. This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored in a database. 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 the information may become part of a national databank. I will provide you with a copy of any report I submit, if you request it. By signing this Agreement, you agree that I can provide requested information to your insurance carrier.

CONTACTING ME

I am usually in my office between 10 a.m. and 7 p.m. However, I do not answer the phone when I am with clients. At other times, you may leave a message on our confidential voicemail. If I am unavailable for an extended time, I will provide you with the name of a trusted colleague whom you can contact as needed.

When leaving a message for me, please leave your phone number and a few different times when I can return your call. I will make every effort to return your call the same day, except for weekends and holidays.

In an emergency, please call your family physician or go to the nearest emergency room. At the hospital, ask for the psychiatrist on call. Leave me a message when you can. I will return your call as soon as I receive your message, but on weekends and holidays I may not receive your message until the next business day.

DIGITAL POLICY

I prefer to schedule appointments by telephone and voicemail. Although emails you send me from my website are confidential, ordinary email is not confidential. If you choose to communicate with me in this way, please be aware that emails are retained in the logs of your and my Internet service providers.

I use email only to arrange or modify appointments. Please do not email me any information related to the content of your therapy sessions; engaging with me this way could compromise your confidentiality. It may also create the possibility that these exchanges become a part of your legal medical record which might need to be documented and archived. If you need to contact me between sessions, the best way to do so is by phone.

Also, please do not use text messages or social networking sites to contact me. These sites are not confidential and I may not read these messages in a timely fashion. Once we have established a client/therapist relationship, please do not engage with me on any online public domain.

I do not accept any social networking requests from current or former clients, because that could compromise your confidentiality and our respective privacy. It may also blur the boundaries of our therapeutic relationship. If you have questions about this, please bring them up when we meet and we can discuss your concerns.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDS

The standards of my profession require that I keep appropriate treatment records. If you both release them, I will provide both of you with a copy of your records or a summary. Because these are professional records, they may be misinterpreted and possibly upsetting. If you wish to see your records, I recommend you review them with me so we can discuss what they contain.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In couples therapy, you are my clients together. Because of this, I do not keep secrets between the two of you. To be an effective therapist, it is necessary I have your permission to use everything I know to help you.

If I were to make an agreement with one of you keep some crucial information secret from the other, your therapy would be severely compromised. There might be important issues that we would not be able to address. One of you would know I was keeping a secret from the other. One of you would be deceived by your therapist. For all these reasons, I don't keep secrets between the two of you. So, if you have a secret Swiss bank account, or a secret affair, don't tell me about it unless you are also ready to share it with your partner. I am your couples therapist, not your individual therapist.

To release information about your couples therapy, I need to have written releases from both of you. In general, the law protects the confidentiality of all communications between clients and psychologist. I only release information about our work with both of your written releases. Clients often give me releases to talk to their individual therapists, and/or previous therapists. This helps me to coordinate your couples therapy and be most helpful to you.

Conceivably, one of you might think that my records would be helpful to you in a legal proceeding, such as a divorce. Please remember, releasing these records requires written releases from both of you. In most judicial proceedings, you have the right to prevent me from providing information about your treatment. Unless both of you consent to a release, I am not allowed to release information about your treatment. Therefore either one of you can stop such a release of information.

I have been informed by counsel that in circumstances such as child custody proceedings (and proceedings in which your mental health is an important element) it is conceivable that a judge might require my testimony, in spite of your non-consent and in spite of my repeated legal objections on the basis of confidentiality. Of course, I would do my best to prevent this. And, let me add, nothing like this has never happened in my years of practice.

There are also a few situations in which I am legally required to protect someone, even if that involves revealing some information about a client's treatment:

1. If I believe that a child, elderly or disabled person is being abused, I may be required by law to file a report with the appropriate state agency.

2. If I believe that a client of mine is threatening serious bodily harm to another person, I may be required to take protective action. This may include notifying the potential victim, notifying the police, or seeking appropriate hospitalization.

3. If a client of mine threatens to harm him/herself, I may be required to seek hospitalization for that client, or contact family members or others who can help provide protection.

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

Occasionally, I find it helpful to consult with other professionals about a situation in therapy. In these consultations, I avoid revealing the identity of my clients.

IN CONCLUSION

I want to say, again, that I am honored that you have chosen me as your couples therapist. I will do everything I can to help you move forward, solve your problems, and be happy with each other again.

AGREEMENT

My signature below indicates that I have read the information in this document and I agree to these guidelines for our professional relationship.

Name

Date

Name

Date

Revised January 2016