

**Service Agreement and Privacy Information:**

Welcome to my practice. This document contains important information about my professional services and business policies. It also contains summary information about the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), a federal law that provides privacy protections and patient rights about the use and disclosure of your Protected Health Information (PHI) for the purposes of treatment, payment, and health care operations. Although these documents are long and sometimes complex, it is very important that you understand them. When you sign this document, it will also represent an agreement between us. We can discuss any questions you have when you sign them or at any time in the future.

Therapy is a relationship between people that works in part because of clearly defined rights and responsibilities held by each person. As a client in psychotherapy, you have certain rights and responsibilities that are important for you to understand. There are also legal limitations to those rights that you should be aware of. I, as your therapist, have corresponding responsibilities to you. These rights and responsibilities are described in the following sections and on a separate sheet provided to you called: Privacy Laws: Consumer Information.

Psychotherapy has both benefits and risks. Risks may include experiencing uncomfortable feelings, such as sadness, guilt, anxiety, anger, frustration, loneliness and helplessness, because the process of psychotherapy often requires discussing the unpleasant aspects of your life.  However, psychotherapy has been shown to have benefits for individuals who undertake it.  Therapy often leads to a significant reduction in feelings of distress, increased satisfaction in interpersonal relationships, greater personal awareness and insight, increased skills for managing stress and resolutions to specific problems.  But, there are no guarantees about what will happen.  Psychotherapy requires a very active effort on your part.

To be most successful, you will have to work on things we discuss outside of sessions. The initial sessions will involve an assessment of your needs. By the end of that assessment period, I will be able to offer you some initial impressions of what our work might include. At that point, we will discuss your treatment goals and create an initial treatment plan. You should evaluate this information and make your own assessment about whether you feel comfortable working with me. 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.

APPOINTMENTS   
Appointments will ordinarily be 50-60 minutes in duration, once per week at a time we agree upon, although some sessions may be more or less frequent as needed. The time scheduled for your appointment is assigned to you and you alone. If you need to cancel or reschedule a session, I ask that you provide me with notice outside of 24 hours. If you miss a session without canceling, or cancel within 24 hours, my policy is to collect $45 (unless we both agree that you were unable to attend due to circumstances beyond your control). It is important to note that insurance companies do not provide reimbursement for cancelled sessions; thus, you will be responsible for the fee as described above. If it is possible, I will try to find another time to reschedule the appointment. In addition, you are responsible for coming to your session on time; if you are late, your appointment will still need to end on time.

In addition to weekly appointments, it is my practice to charge on a prorated basis (I will break down the hourly cost) for other professional services that you may require such as report writing, telephone conversations that last longer than 15 minutes, attendance at meetings or consultations which you have requested, or the time required to perform any other service which you may request of me. If you anticipate becoming involved in a court case, I recommend that we discuss this fully in relation to confidentiality. If your case requires my participation, you will be expected to pay for the professional time required even if another party compels me to testify.

INSURANCE  
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 may provide coverage for mental health treatment. With your permission, I will assist you to the extent possible in filing claims and ascertaining information about your coverage, but you are responsible for knowing your coverage and for letting me know if/when your coverage changes.

Managed Health Care plans such as HMOs and PPOs, and EAPs sometimes require advance authorization, without which they may refuse to provide reimbursement for mental health services, and the fee then becomes your responsibility. 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. Some managed-care plans will not allow me to provide services to you once your benefits end. If this is the case, I will do my best to find another provider who will help you continue your psychotherapy.

In order for payment to be made by insurance companies, a clinical diagnosis is required. (Diagnoses are technical terms that describe the nature of your problems and whether they are short-term or long-term problems.  All diagnoses come from a book entitled the DSM-V. Sometimes I have to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of the entire record (in rare cases). This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored in a computer. 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 review 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 carrier if you plan to pay with insurance.

Many policies leave a percentage of the fee (called co-insurance ) or a flat dollar amount (referred to as a co-payment) to be covered by the patient. Either amount is to be paid at the time of the visit by check or cash. In addition, most insurance companies also have a deductible, which is an out-of-pocket amount, that must be paid by the patient before the insurance companies are willing to begin pay any amount for services for each fiscal or calendar year. It is important to remember that you always have the right to pay for my services yourself to avoid the problems described above, unless prohibited by my provider contract.

If I am not a participating provider for your insurance plan, I will work with you to create a reasonable payment plan. Please note that not all insurance companies reimburse for out-of-network providers.  If you prefer to use a participating provider, I will refer you to a colleague.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDS

I am required to keep appropriate records of the psychological services that I provide. Your records are maintained in a secure location in the office. I keep brief records noting that you were here, your reasons for seeking therapy, the goals and progress we set for treatment, your diagnosis, topics we discussed, your medical, social, and treatment history, records I receive from other providers, copies of records I send to others, and your billing records. Except in unusual circumstances that involve danger to yourself, you have the right to a copy of your file. Because these are professional records, they may be misinterpreted and / or upsetting to untrained readers.  For this reason, I recommend that you initially review them with me, or have them forwarded to another mental health professional to discuss the contents. If I refuse your request for access to your records, you have a right to have my decision reviewed by another mental health professional, which I will discuss with you upon your request. You also have the right to request that a copy of your file be made available to any other health care provider at your written request.

In the unlikely event that I should be unable to function for whatever reason, I have arranged, with specific therapists, to manage and maintain my clinical records for the period of time indicated by Nebraska State law and my national professional organization’s (AAMFT) ethics rules, so that your records may be accessible to you if you need them. They will also have access to your contact information and records to provide you with appropriate care, referral, or resources as needed.

CONTACTING ME  
I am often not immediately available by telephone. I do not answer my phone when I am with clients or otherwise unavailable. At these times, you may leave a message on my confidential voice mail and your call will be returned as soon as possible, but it may take a day or two for non-urgent matters. If, for any number of unseen reasons, you do not hear from me or I am unable to reach you, and you feel you cannot wait for a return call or if you feel unable to keep yourself safe please contact 9-1-1 or your nearest emergency room. I will make every attempt to inform you in advance of planned absences and provide you with the name and phone number of the mental health professional covering my practice.

OTHER RIGHTS  
If you are unhappy with what is happening in therapy, I hope you will talk with me so that I can respond to your concerns. Such comments will be taken seriously and handled with care and respect. You may also request that I refer you to another therapist and are free to end therapy at any time. You have the right to considerate, safe and respectful care, without discrimination as to race, ethnicity, color, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, or source of payment. You have the right to ask questions about any aspects of therapy and about my specific training and experience. You have the right to expect that I will not have social or sexual relationships with clients or with former clients.

CONSENT TO PSYCHOTHERAPY  
Your signature and initials on the Client Intake Form indicates that you have read this Agreement and the Privacy Laws information and agree to the terms of these forms.