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## INFORMED CONSENT FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL TREATMENT

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### **Psychotherapy / Play Therapy**

Psychotherapy (talk therapy for adults or play therapy for children) is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the psychologist and patient, and the particular problems being addressed in treatment. There are many different methods your psychologist 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.

### **Intake Process**

The first session will involve an assessment of your needs via a clinical interview. This process may include additional sessions and/or the administration of psychological tests. By the end of the intake process, your psychologist will offer some first impressions of what the therapeutic work would include and, if you decide to continue treatment, a treatment plan will be prepared for you to review. You should evaluate this information, along with your own opinions of whether you feel comfortable working with the psychologist who interviews you. Psychotherapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should be very careful about the psychologist you select. If you have questions about your psychologist's procedures, you should discuss them whenever they arise. If any doubts persist, or if your needs are outside the scope of your psychologist's education, training, and experience, then your psychologist will be happy to provide a referral for another psychologist or mental health professional.

### **Intake Assessment is not Psychological Evaluation**

Although the intake process involves an assessment of your problems, and may include some limited psychological testing, the intake assessment and any subsequent treatment does not constitute a psychological evaluation.

### **Risks and Benefits**

Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Since psychotherapy 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 willing to go through it. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, significant reductions in symptoms and overall feelings of distress, and an increase in overall felt quality of life. However, psychotherapy is not an exact science. No guarantees are made of what you will experience during or as a result of treatment.

### **Psychotherapy is not Advocacy**

Although the psychologist-patient relationship is a helping one, and although your psychologist will make decisions and interventions with your best interest in mind, your psychologist's role with you will be as a treating psychologist and not advocate. Professional opinions outside the scope of treatment will not be formed or communicated to third parties.

### **Sessions**

Normally, the intake process will last anywhere from 1 to 2 sessions. During this time, you and your psychologist can both decide if he/she is the best person to provide the services you need in order to meet your treatment goals. If you begin psychotherapy, we will schedule a weekly 45-minute session, though some sessions may be longer or more frequent. Once we agree on your appointment hour, you will be expected to regularly attend, fully participate, and follow recommended treatment. The full fee will be charged, unless you provide 24 hours advance notice of cancellation. Note that insurance companies do not cover fees for missed appointments.

If you are the parent/guardian of a child receiving services, you must remain in the building while your minor child is receiving services and be present at the time of completion of services to provide transportation, unless other arrangements are agreed upon.

### **Professional Fees**

The fee for clinical interview is \$150, 45-minute psychotherapy is \$120, and one hour of psychotherapy is \$160. The same amount will be charged for other professional services you may need, such as report writing, telephone conversations, attendance at meetings with other professionals you have authorized, preparation of records or treatment summaries, etc. If you become involved in legal proceedings that require your psychologist's participation, you will be expected to pay for professional time even if your psychologist is called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement, the charge is \$300 per hour for preparation and attendance at any legal proceedings.

### **Billing and Payment**

You will receive an itemized statement at the end of the month and payment in full is required within 10 days of receipt, unless we agree otherwise or unless you have insurance coverage which requires another arrangement. Except in the case of emergency treatment, professional records may be withheld from release to third parties until payment in full has been received.

If you have health insurance, it will usually provide some coverage for mental health services. Know that your insurance policy is a contract between you and your insurance company. We are not a party to that contract. If you so choose, Abintra Psychological Associates will bill your insurance provider and provide you with reasonable assistance to receive the benefits to which you are entitled. However, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of fees, regardless of any insurance company's arbitrary determination of usual and customary rates for services. It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers. If you have questions about your coverage, call your plan administrator.

If payment from your insurance company is not received within 90 days, you will be expected to pay the full fee. After 90 days, there will be a finance charge of 1.5% per month charged to your account. Delinquent accounts may be turned over to a professional collection agency or attorney for appropriate action. You will assume responsibility for all collection charges incurred, including legal fees. If attorneys file a court action, you waive your right to appear in court and contest the verified balance of fees and interest. Further, you confess judgment against you in the amount of the verified balance, together with costs of collection, court costs, attorney's fees, and interest.

Some insurance plans may limit treatment to short-term methods designed to address specific problems that interfere with a person's usual level of functioning. While a lot can be accomplished in short-term therapy, many patients feel they need more service after insurance benefits end. It may be necessary to seek approval for more therapy after a certain number of sessions. However, some plans will not allow additional sessions. 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.

Insurance companies often require pre-authorization before they provide reimbursement for mental health services, and most insurance companies require you to authorize us to provide them with information about you, such as a clinical diagnosis, treatment plans, summaries, or the entire record. This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored on a computer. Though all insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, we have no control over what they do with it once it is in their hands.

It is important to remember that you always have the right to pay for psychological services yourself to avoid the problems described above.

### **Availability and Contact**

Abintra psychologists are not immediately available by telephone, and a 24-hour answering service is not available. While we are usually in the office during the day, we will not answer the phone when we are with patients. Feel free to call the office and leave a voicemail message, and we will make our best effort to return calls in a timely manner. If you are unable to reach us and feel that you cannot wait for us to return your call, contact your physician, call 911, or report to the emergency room of your choice. If your psychologist will be

unavailable for an extended period of time, he/she will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact, if needed.

**Confidentiality**

In general, the privacy of all communications between a patient and a psychologist is protected by law, and information about you can only be released with your expressed permission. But, there are some exceptions.

First, there are some situations in which psychologists are legally obligated to take action to protect people from harm, even if a patient's information needs to be revealed. For example, suspicions of abuse, neglect, or exploitation of children or dependent adults must be reported to the appropriate state agency. Threats of harm to other people must be taken seriously, and psychologists are required to warn the potential victim and notify the police. Threats or risk of self-harm must be taken seriously, and a psychologist may seek hospitalization for the patient or may contact family members or others to provide protection during such emergencies.

Second, if your treatment is, or will be, connected with legal issues, a judge may require your psychologist to release information or records about you or to provide written or oral testimony in the case. Such information may become part of the public record, and that determination is outside your psychologist's control.

Third, as noted above, most insurance companies require you to authorize your psychologist to provide them with information about you, such as your diagnosis. Such information will become part of the insurance company's files, and your psychologist will have no control over what they do with that information.

Fourth, if you choose to email your psychologist, those electronic communications will become part of the clinical record. No guarantee is made regarding the privacy of electronic communications.

While this summary of exceptions to confidentiality should be helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important for you to discuss with your psychologist any questions or concerns you may have. Your psychologist is not an attorney and cannot provide you with formal legal advice. The laws governing confidentiality are quite complex, and you are encouraged to consult your attorney if needed.

Finally, just as your privacy and rights will be respected, you will be expected to respect the privacy and rights of other patients receiving services here by not disclosing who you see or what you hear to anyone outside this agency, either during or after your treatment.

**Professional Records**

The laws and standards of the psychological profession require your psychologist to keep treatment records. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. If you wish to see your records, it is recommended that you discuss this with your psychologist so that he/she can discuss their contents with you. Patients will be charged the appropriate fee for any professional time spent in responding to information requests.

**Acknowledgment**

I acknowledge that I have read the information in this document and have been given an opportunity to ask any and all questions. I further acknowledge that, even though I may have been referred for services, I am voluntarily seeking psychological treatment and agree to abide by the terms of this document.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Patient

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Parent/Guardian (if patient is a minor)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date