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COUPLES THERAPY CONTRACT

This document deals with privacy issues specific to couples and supplements the document already given to you that deals with related issues in therapy. Please read it carefully and jot down any questions you might have so that we can discuss them. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between us.

First of all, I wish to reassure you that I am personally and professionally committed to protecting your privacy. I realize that therapy can only take place in a setting in which everyone feels secure in the knowledge that his or her thoughts and feelings will remain protected and secure within the confines of the therapy office.

However, issues concerning personal privacy and professional confidentiality are somewhat more complicated when working with married or unmarried couples. In addition to the exceptions to confidentiality outlined to you in my contract, work with couples may require certain additional compromises in privacy. For example, part of our couples work may require that I meet individually with you and at other times with your spouse or partner. During those individual meetings I will require from you permission to share with your partner anything that I deem appropriate. I will strive to use my best professional judgment to share this information as considerately and kindly as possible. Therefore, although I hope you would be completely honest with me about your personal as well as relationship concerns, you might choose not to share with me certain information if you are concerned about the possibility of your partner learning of it. Essentially, what I am saying is that unless we make a prior agreement about certain specific information, I will use my professional judgment in deciding whether or not any information you have shared with me will subsequently be shared with your spouse/partner.

In this regard, there may be times when you or your partner requests that I keep certain information secret from the other. At times I might agree to “keep your secret.” Thus, there may be times when I might have learned something from you that I will agree to keep secret from your partner. Accordingly, there may be time when your partner and I agree to keep certain information from you. Unfortunately, this is part of the nature of working with couples. Thus, we will all be walking through a complicated maze of agreements and private communications.

Some therapists attempt to get around this complication by making blanket rules that I believe do not best serve the couples we work with. For example, some therapists have a “no secrets policy.” These therapists say that everything and anything that they hear in therapy will be shared with the other partner. Although it could be argued that this approach could “make life easier” for the therapist-he or she does not have to decide when or what information will be kept from the other person-I believe that it is better for the therapist to make the final determination about what is or is not essential for either partner to know.

Other therapists avoid this problem in another way by simply requiring that all couple meetings take place conjointly. These therapists ensure that they never hear a private or secret communication by arranging to never meet privately with only one member of the couple. Thus, if one spouse/partner cannot make it to a session, the session is cancelled. I, on the other hand, believe that couples are best served by giving each member of the couple the opportunity to meet with me individually. Unfortunately, with that flexibility goes certain inevitable confidentiality “complications.”

What are some of the complications that can arise from this policy? I might uncover or discover secrets about you or your partner/spouse that the other of you is unaware of. For example, I might learn that your partner/spouse 1) had an affair that is now ended; 2) is still having an affair and wants my help in ending it; or 3) is still having an affair and has no intention of ending it.

In brief, my policy concerning private communication is that I reserve for myself the right to share or withhold from you or your partner information that I learn from you or your partner during individual therapy sessions. My commitment to each of you is to assist you in having the kind of relationship you desire. My experience is that the chance of reaching that goal is enhanced if I have the flexibility in those privacy and confidentiality issues spelled out in this paper.

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

Signature

Date