

Wellspring Center PLLC

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Boundaries and the Therapeutic Relationship

The therapeutic relationship is unique in that, while it is a professional relationship, it contains elements of a personal relationship such as trust, intimacy, regular and close contact, and self-disclosure. For this reason, it is crucial that the boundaries of the professional relationship be explained and understood at the very start of the therapy process to avoid confusion and potential harm to the prospective client. In this professional relationship, the client agrees to provide payment (either out of pocket or through their insurance provider) for a professional service typically offered within the confines of the provider's office, or via teletherapy. The provider and client have mutual obligations to one another in the context of the relationship—the provider is meant to provide competent, ethical and confidential treatment in accordance with professional standards, laws and ethics and the client is meant to invest effort, time and resources in the form of active participation, regular attendance, compliance with treatment recommendations and prompt payment for services.

Risk for Harm Issue

Failure of either party to fulfill their responsibilities and observe professional boundaries are possible grounds for premature termination of the relationship and may result in potential harm for one or both parties. Failure of the provider to follow professional standards of care, laws, or ethics may result in emotional harm to the client; failure of the client to observe boundaries, follow written policies or comply with treatment will disrupt the treatment process and may result in discharge from care. Neither of these outcomes is desirable. The sole purpose of the relationship is to help the client attain their identified treatment goals in a time-limited process that has a beginning and an end with clear boundaries in place for the well-being of all parties involved. Client safety and well-being are paramount.

In order to provide a safe environment for existing clients, many of whom have been victims of trauma, this provider does not offer services to individuals with a history of perpetrating violent or sexual offenses. Engaging in threats of violence, violent behavior, aggressive or intimidating behavior, or harassment will not be tolerated and may result in termination from treatment and possible legal charges. Criminal acts on the premises will be reported for the safety of all concerned.

Boundaries for Contact

Because a provider is in a relatively more powerful position as a trusted service provider and expert in human behavior working with vulnerable individuals, misuse of that power could result in exploitation of a client. Clear boundaries are put in place to avoid that risk. For instance, contact between provider and clients is restricted to scheduled appointments, communications regarding therapeutic and administrative issues, and emergencies. Clients are provided with the provider's contact information to facilitate that communication—business office line for routine and administrative issues; text for scheduling appts and appt updates (non-clinical information); and mobile phone for scheduled teletherapy sessions and emergencies. Social calls or prolonged non-emergent calls do not fall within

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the boundary of the professional relationship. There is a charge for all therapeutic contacts of 15 min or more, including teletherapy. There is generally no charge for brief calls or calls for the purpose of coordinating care.

Sessions are one hour in duration, with few exceptions, and clients are expected to honor the time limit. The provider schedules clients on the hour every hour so it is imperative that sessions end on time to afford every client their full scheduled time. Intensive or complicated issues will be addressed as fully as possible within a session but if further resolution is needed, it may be necessary to schedule an additional therapy session by phone (teletherapy session) or in person (office visit) at a later time. Clients will be charged for exceeding their allotted time if a pattern continues. Clients are urged to be intentional about the issues they wish to address in each session and, as such, to broach complex issues from the start to avoid the problem of ending the session with unresolved distress.

Telephone calls for routine issues should be made to the provider during scheduled business hours (Mon-Fri 9:00 to 5:00). This provider makes her best effort to return phone calls the same day when possible and no later than within 24 business hours. Emergency calls should not be placed to the office phone line; please call 911 for all psychiatric or life-threatening emergencies. Crisis situations that are not life threatening may be made to the provider's mobile number provided to each client at the onset of therapy. Texts should be reserved for scheduling issues and brief updates or questions—please be aware that it is not always possible for the provider to respond to texts immediately. Every effort will be made to respond to texts as quickly as possible. Repeated failures to observe reasonable guidelines for contact will be addressed in therapy if unresolved.

Dual Relationships

Dual relationships occur when the provider and client engage in contact or a relationship outside of the professional relationship. For instance, providers are prohibited from sexual relationships of any kind with clients, former clients or clients' family members. Providers are advised against social media contact with clients or accepting friend requests from clients in order to protect the boundaries of the professional relationship. Providers may not troll social media for information about clients—it is not ethical and is an invasion of privacy. Financial or business relationships are not advised—a provider may not employ a client or client's relative to perform services such as housecleaning, tax preparation, babysitting or home repairs, for example. Providers are advised against joining social groups where clients are also members. Such dual relationships blur the boundaries of the provider-client relationship and have potential to exploit or harm the client if one of the relationships should end badly or incur conflict. Every effort must be made by the provider to protect the safety, trust and confidentiality of the client even if the client desires a dual relationship. It is prohibited.

There are times when social contact between providers and clients cannot be avoided, say, in small communities, in public places or large events. In those cases, the client takes the lead—if the client nods, smiles or says hello, the provider will take that as permission to respond in kind. If the client looks away or indicates in any way he may not want to be acknowledged, the provider is to ignore rather than acknowledge and discuss the encounter in the next therapy session to address the client's preferences should a similar situation occur in the future. In no way will confidentiality be violated by acknowledging

the client as a client in a public setting. Likewise, greetings should remain brief and avoid engaging in lengthy conversations that may be overheard or result in confidential information being shared openly.

Providers are prohibited from establishing friendships with clients even after the therapeutic relationship has ended. Sexual relationships with a client at any point in time are a violation of professional ethics and grounds for loss of licensure and possible prosecution.

Due to cultural or gender issues, history of harm, or personal preference, clients differ in their tolerance or desire for appropriate physical contact while greeting, exiting a session, or when in distress. Clients are asked to share their preferences with the provider at the start of therapy to avoid any confusion or discomfort for the client. In the local culture, hugs and handshakes in social settings are quite common and to refrain from touch may unintentionally insult or alienate the client. In the absence of clear guidance from a client, a handshake will be offered to participants at the end of a session.

Gifts

Gifts are not expected in exchange for professional services offered. The fee paid by the client or their insurer is all the payment that is required. It is *not* inappropriate to offer a card of thanks if a session or episode of treatment has been especially helpful but, again, is not expected or required. Expensive gifts are deemed inappropriate and cannot be accepted. Likewise, your provider cannot offer gifts in celebration of clients' milestone events (birthday, graduation, wedding, birth of baby) nor may they usually attend these events (confidentiality issues) but please know that your provider shares your joy for these momentous occasions and will express that sentiment in your sessions, or with a card if appropriate.

Legal Involvement

This provider does not provide expert witness testimony or testimony on behalf of clients in civil court proceedings. To do so presents significant risk for violating client trust when information is disclosed or disrupting the therapeutic relationship if the provider shares an opinion or information that could result in unintended negative consequences for the client. Please refer to the Notice of Privacy Practices given to you at onset of treatment to review exceptions to the law protecting provider-patient privilege.

I have reviewed and understand the information provided above and agree to respect the boundaries necessary for the protection of the provider-client relationship. I agree to discuss with my provider any concerns that may arise regarding boundary issues.

Client Name (signature)

(print)

Date

Provider

Date

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