

## **Psychotherapist - Client Contract**

### **Outpatient Services**

Welcome to my practice. This document contains important information about my professional services and business policies. Please read it carefully and jot down any questions you might have so that we can discuss them at our next meeting. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between us.

### **Psychological Services**

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the psychologist and client and the particular problems you bring forward. There are many different methods I 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. In order for the therapy to be more successful, you will have to work on things we talk about both during our sessions and at home.

Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Since therapy 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 who go through it. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reduction in feelings of distress. However, there are no guarantees of what you will experience.

Our first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs (or the needs of your child). By the end of the evaluation, I will be able to offer you some first impressions of what our work will include and a treatment plan to follow, if you decide to continue therapy. You should evaluate this information along with your own opinions of whether you feel comfortable working with me. Therapy involves a large commitment of time, money and energy, so you should be very careful about the therapist you select. If you have any 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.

### **Meetings**

I normally conduct an evaluation that will last from 2 to 4 sessions. During this time, we can both decide whether I am the best person to provide the services you and/or your child needs in order to meet your treatment goals. If psychotherapy has begun, I will usually schedule one 50-minute session per week at a time we agree on, although some sessions may be longer or more frequent. Once an appointment hour is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you give 24 hours notice of cancellation. Parent guidance sessions will be scheduled once or twice monthly and is an appropriate time for you and I to meet to discuss any questions or concerns related to your child's treatment. Please refer to my office policies for more detailed information regarding my cancellation and payment policies.

## **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. I am happy to fill out forms and provide you with whatever assistance I can in helping you receive the benefits to which you are entitled; however, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of my fees. It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

You should carefully read the section in your insurance coverage booklet that describes mental health services (sometimes referred to as behavioral health services). If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. I will provide you with whatever information I can based on my experience and will be happy to help you in understanding the information you receive from your insurance company.

Due to the rising costs of health care, insurance benefits have increasingly become more complex. It is sometimes difficult to determine exactly how much mental health coverage is available. Managed health care plans such as HMOs and PPOs often require authorization before they provide reimbursement for mental health services. 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 clients feel that they need more services after insurance benefits end. Bear in mind that 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.

You should be aware that most insurance companies require you to authorize me to provide them with a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes I have to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans, summaries, or copies of the entire record (rare cases). This information will become part of the insurance company's 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, they may share the information with a national medical information database. I will provide you with a copy of any report I submit if you request it.

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

## **Contacting Me**

I am often not immediately available by telephone. While I am usually in the office between 9 AM and 5 PM, I probably will not answer the phone when I am with a client. When I am unavailable, my telephone is answered by voice mail. I will make every effort to return your call on the same day you make it, with the exception of weekends and holidays. If you are difficult to reach, please inform me of times when you are available. If you are unable to reach me and feel that you can't wait for me to return your call, contact 911 or go to the nearest emergency room and ask for the psychiatrist on call. If I will be unavailable for an extended time, I will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact.

## **Professional Records**

The laws and standards of my profession require that I keep treatment records. You are entitled to receive a copy of your records unless I believe that seeing them would be emotionally damaging, in which case I will be happy to send them or a summary to a mental health professional of your choice. In some cases I may choose to provide you with a summary of the records. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted by and/or upsetting to untrained readers. If you wish to see your records, I recommend that you review them in my presence so that we can discuss the contents. Clients will be charged an appropriate fee for any professional time spent in responding to information requests.

## **Minors**

If you are under 18 years of age, please be aware that the law may provide your parents the right to examine your treatment records. It is my policy to request an agreement from parents that they agree to give up access to your records. If they agree, I will provide them only with general information about our work together, unless I feel there is a high risk that you will seriously harm yourself or someone else. In this case, I will notify them of my concern. I will also provide them with a summary of your treatment when it is complete. Before giving them any information, I will discuss the matter with you, if possible, and do my best to handle any objections you may have about what I prepared to discuss.

## **Confidentiality**

In general, the law protects the privacy of all communications between a client and a psychologist, and I can release information about our work to others only with your written permission. But there are a few exceptions.

In most legal proceedings, you have the right to prevent me from providing any information about your treatment. In some proceedings involving child custody and those in which your emotional condition is an important issue, a judge may order my testimony if he or she determines that the issues demand it.

There are some situations in which I am legally obligated to take action to protect others from harm, even if I have to reveal some information about a client's treatment. For example, if I believe that a child, elderly person or disabled person is being abused, I must call and file a report with the appropriate state agency.

If I believe that a client is threatening serious bodily harm to another, I am required to take protective actions. These actions may include notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, or seeking hospitalization for the client. If the client threatens to harm himself or herself, I may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him or her or to contact family member or others who can help provide protection.

These situations do not occur frequently. If a similar situation occurs, I will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action. I may occasionally find it helpful to consult other professionals about the case. During a consultation, I make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of my client. The consultant is also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you don't object, I will not tell you about these consultations unless I feel it is important in our work together.

While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important that we discuss any questions or concerns that you may have at our next meeting. I will be happy to discuss these issues with you if you need specific advice, but formal legal advice may be needed because the laws governing confidentiality are quite complex, and I am not an attorney.

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 of Minor Child:  
(ages 12-17, inclusive)

\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_

Name of Guardian:

\_\_\_\_\_

Relationship of Guardian:

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Guardian:

\_\_\_\_\_Date\_\_\_\_\_