

Policies & Procedures/Disclosure Statement (Effective 1/2005)

Welcome to my practice. Here is some information to help you understand how psychotherapy works. Please read it carefully. If it's all agreeable to you and you would like to move forward, please sign at the bottom and return one signed page to me. If you have any questions, please make a point to discuss them with me at our first meeting.

PSYCHOTHERAPY

Psychotherapy is not easy to describe. It is a process by which people discuss, and take actions to change troubling aspects of their lives. The process varies depending on the particular problems that the clients (you) bring, the training of the therapist (me), and the personalities of the clients and the therapist. Psychotherapy requires hard work on your part. In order to be successful, you will have to put a lot of effort into your sessions and during the time between sessions.

Benefits and risks. Research has shown that two-thirds to three-quarters of clients find their therapy helpful. Psychotherapy often leads to a significant reduction of distress, increased understanding of yourself and others, better relationships, and resolution of specific problems. I hope you will experience better communication, greater success handling difficult issues, greater understanding of your relationship(s), and a greater sense of confidence and self worth.

The risks of psychotherapy include feelings of frustration, fear, anger, pain, and sadness. You may have to talk about things that are difficult to discuss. You may have to make some changes in your habitual ways of doing things – and this may feel difficult at first. You may disagree with the opinions and recommendations offered. Your therapy may involve recalling unpleasant aspects of your life and life history. Also, you may have new insights into yourself and others that may initially feel uncomfortable.

Limitations of Services: Unfortunately, since psychotherapy is not an exact science and requires considerable effort and motivation in order to effect change, there can be no guarantees about what your experience or outcome will be. Alternative services include those offered by another therapist, counselor, psychologist, psychiatrist or other mental health professional or agency, day treatment services, or partial hospitalization programs.

STARTING THERAPY

Research has shown that the most important predictor of therapy success is a good working relationship between client(s) and therapist. For this reason, in our first few sessions, we need to collaborate and find ways to work together well. I will show you my style of therapy and answer any questions you may have about me. I will give you my initial impressions of what your therapy will include and we will set initial goals for what you hope to accomplish. If you would like, I will direct you to written materials that describe my approach to therapy.

Please let me know what makes you comfortable and uncomfortable. If you have been in previous psychotherapy, let me know what seemed to be helpful and what wasn't. We need to work together to establish good teamwork - just as in any good relationship.

Since therapy involves a substantial commitment of time, money, and energy, this is an important task to do well.

I can help you best if you are:

- able to plan and keep consistent weekly, biweekly, or monthly appointments.
- willing and able to set your own agendas for therapy sessions.
- willing to acknowledge your contribution to the difficulties in your life and relationships.
- willing to make changes in the way you talk and the things you do.
- willing to do recommended “homework.”
- willing to discuss decisions in therapy before taking independent action.

MAKING THE MOST OF APPOINTMENT TIMES

Therapy sessions are 50 minutes long. For couples or family therapy appointments, if one of you is late, we will wait until everyone arrives before we begin to work. Or, if one of you cannot come to a couples or family appointment, you will have to cancel and reschedule that appointment.

Please be prompt for scheduled appointments so that you, your child, or family members receive the benefit of a full session. Session timing begins at the scheduled time, not the time you arrive. Please plan for, and make allowances for traffic, weather, etc. If you are running late for an appointment, or are lost, feel free to call my cell phone number to let me know (404.702.2007). However, since this is a number generally used only for emergencies, please do not routinely call this number.

If you have specific items that you want to discuss with me, let me know at the *beginning* of the appointment time so we can take care of them first. There will not be time to address issues after the session is over, and they will have to wait until the next appointment. This includes scheduling of the next appointment, if needed.

On rare occasions, I may arrive late for, or have to miss an appointment due to an emergency or an unforeseen circumstance. If I am more than 15 minutes late, please assume that this has happened. I will make every attempt to contact you to let you know of such circumstances before you drive to the office, or as quickly as possible afterward to set up another appointment time.

CANCELLATIONS AND RESCHEDULING

My cancellation policy has three parts.

- 1) When any of us needs to cancel or reschedule an appointment, we each agree to give the others *as much notice as possible*.
- 2) If you cancel an appointment with less than 24 hours notice, or miss a scheduled appointment, you will pay \$30.00 for that time (because the time was saved for you and is not available to anyone else). This 24 hour notice policy applies *regardless of reason* for the cancellation. The only exceptions are situations that require immediate medical attention, or death in the family and in those exceptions there is no charge. However, there are some other circumstances that do result in a charge even though you may have no control over them. These include last-minute business meetings, car breakdowns, minor illnesses,

babysitters who don't show up, and similar difficulties. I empathize with these problems, and I sometimes have them myself. Nonetheless, if they cause me to miss an appointment that you have traveled to, I will credit you \$30. And if they cause you to have to cancel an appointment with less 24 hours notice, you will pay \$30.00.

- 3) If I cancel or miss an appointment and you have made a trip to my office as a result, I will credit \$30 for that time (because you had the inconvenience of the trip).

FEES AND PAYMENT

You are expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise in advance. Please have your payment available prior to the beginning of the session. You may pay by check or cash. If you have insurance that covers psychotherapy, I will give you an invoice monthly to send to your insurance company so that they can reimburse you. This invoice will have all of the necessary information that your insurance company requires for consideration of your claim.

I turn unpaid balances over to a collection agency (National Credit Systems) if no attempts are made to pay them after you have received an invoice. You will be assessed a \$20.00 collections fee when this occurs. I may waive the missed appointment fee if YOU make arrangements to reschedule an appointment within that week AND there is a time slot available for you. Remember that convenient appointment times are desired by everyone and are relatively few in number.

If you are unable to afford my fee, please discuss this with me in advance of your appointment. I may be able to arrange a payment plan with you, or a discounted fee arrangement, or provide a referral that will allow you to get the help you need at a price you can afford.

OTHER PROFESSIONAL SERVICES

In the rare instance that you should need professional services other than psychotherapy, it is my practice to charge an hourly fee on a prorated basis for the hours required. Such services might include (but are not limited to) report writing, lengthy telephone conversations, meetings or consultations, preparation of records or treatment summaries, etc. In the rare circumstance that you become involved in litigation that requires my participation, you will be expected to pay for my professional time even if I am compelled to testify by another party. Because of the complexity and difficulty of legal involvement, I charge a higher hourly fee for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding. Fees for any of these professional services will be agreed upon at the time these services are requested.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Confidentiality of the therapeutic relationship is an important quality of effective therapy. Laws and ethical codes are written to protect individuals and to safeguard the information that individuals share within that context. Disclosures and communications are considered privileged and confidential. If you want me to release information about your therapy, I need to have written permission from you. If you are in couples therapy, you both need to give me your permission. Information disclosed on a minor must be authorized by the legal custodian.

There are limits to confidentiality, some are required by law, and others are required or implied by professional ethics. In general, the law protects the confidentiality of all communications between clients and therapist and I only release information about our work with your written permission. However, there are some exceptions to this.

1. In a few situations I am legally required to take protective action and reveal some information about a client. Should such a situation occur, I would make every effort to discuss it with you before taking any action if possible.
2. If you or a member of your family threatens to harm herself or himself, I may be required to seek hospitalization for that person, or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.
3. If I believe that you or a member of your family is threatening serious bodily harm to another person, I may be required to take protective action, which may include notifying the potential victim, notifying the police, or seeking appropriate hospitalization.
4. If I believe that a child, an elderly person, or a disabled or mentally incompetent person is being abused, I may be required by law to file a report with the appropriate state agency. These situations have rarely arisen in my practice.
5. In most judicial (legal) proceedings, you have the right to prevent me from providing any information about your treatment. However, in some circumstances such as child custody proceedings (and proceedings in which your mental health is an important element), a judge may require my testimony.
6. If you bring a malpractice action against me, I may disclose to the court information as necessary to defend against such action.
6. Occasionally, I find it helpful to consult with other professionals about a situation in therapy. In other cases, I may use an example from a therapy session in my training of graduate students working toward their professional licensure. In these consultations, I do not reveal the identity or any identifying characteristics of clients.

CONTACTING ME

I am generally in my office two to three days per week and Saturday mornings. I do not answer the telephone when I am with clients. At all times, you may leave a message on my voicemail (404.329.9264). When leaving a message for me, please leave your phone number and several times when I can reach you as well as a brief message as to why you are calling. I will make every effort to return your call on the same day, except for weekends and holidays. The more I know about the reason for your call, the more efficient I can be in responding. If you do not leave your phone number, it will increase the amount of time it takes for me to respond since many times I am not in my office when I retrieve phone messages and do not have access to your records.

If you have a mental health emergency (feelings of wanting to hurt yourself or others, hallucinations, or bizarre behaviors), you may require hospital or medication services. Please leave me a message, call your family physician, contact one of the following phone numbers for evaluation, or go to the emergency room at the nearest hospital. At

the hospital, ask for a psychiatric consult. I will return your call as soon as I receive your message, but on weekends and holidays I may not receive your message until the next business day.

Following are phone numbers for agencies that may be able to help you with your emergency:

Summit Ridge (Gwinnett County, East Atlanta area).....	678.442.5800
Ridgeview Institute (Cobb County area, Northwest Atlanta area).....	770.434.4567
Peachford Hospital (Dunwoody area).....	770.455.3200
Tanner Behavioral Center (Douglasville, Carrollton, West Atlanta area)	770.836.9551
Anchor Hospital (South Atlanta).....	1.866.667.8797
Riverwoods (Southern Regional Psychiatric Center (Riverdale).....	770.991.8500

If I am on vacation, at conference, or will be unavailable for more than a day, I will leave the number of a colleague who has agreed to be available for therapy appointments in my absence.

PROBLEMS WITH THE THERAPY PROCESS

If you have questions or problems with any part of your therapy, please bring these to my attention in session as soon as possible. It is essential that we talk about your concerns, explore them, and resolve them. Our teamwork depends on it, and the success of your therapy depends on it.

Sometimes, I may be able to modify my approach so that it will work better for you. Sometimes, greater explanation will help you understand why I do certain things and why they may be helpful. At other times, the problem you are having with therapy may be very similar to the problem you are having in your other relationship(s). This can be a perfect opportunity for you to learn, grow and change – although it may feel difficult at the time. You may discover something new about yourself that will help you breakthrough an important problem in your relationship(s).

I encourage you to talk about your concerns, problems, and difficulties so that we can resolve them. This kind of discussion is crucial in the therapeutic relationship between you and me – and I believe it is crucial in your relationship with others. However, if your doubts, concerns, or problems about therapy persist, I am willing to suggest another consultant or refer you to another therapist.

ENDING THERAPY

When you feel like terminating your therapy, I would like you to mention this at the beginning of a session. We will use this session and one following session to finish your therapy work. We typically discuss your reasons for terminating your therapy work, any unresolved issues, evaluation of original goals, assessment of progress, statement of remaining concerns, plans for continuing your progress, and similar matters.

FOLLOW-UP AND ONGOING SUPPORT

When the decision is made to end therapy, I will close your file after the last session. All account balances need to be paid in full, or arrangements to do so must be agreed upon. Many people like to know that I am available as a resource whenever they feel the need for support in the future. If you require follow up or would just like a “tune up” or to

“touch base” from time to time, we can make an agreement to arrange that when needed.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDS

The standards of my profession require that I keep appropriate treatment records. If you authorize me to release them, I will do so when I have written permission from you. You may also request a summary of your treatment records from me. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and might possibly be upsetting so I recommend that you review your records with me so that we can discuss what they contain.

Please return the following signed statement to me for my records.
Keep the rest of the document for your records.

My signature below indicates that I have read the information in this document and I agree to abide by these guidelines for our professional relationship. If I disagree with these policies and procedures, I will discuss them, and/or ask for a referral to another therapist.

This psychotherapy agreement will expire automatically under the following circumstances:

- 1. Upon the jointly agreed upon date of termination.
- 2. Upon the date you terminate psychotherapy.
- 3. When you have not attended a scheduled session and do not contact me within 10 days.
- 4. If you have been a regularly attending client and have not scheduled a session or communicated with me and for a period of 30 days.

Signature(s)

Date(s)