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### **Psychotherapist-Client Contract**

#### **Outpatient Services Contract**

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 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 therapist 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 most 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. But there are no guarantees of what you will experience.

Our first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. 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 with 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, as you should be very careful about the therapist you select. If you have 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 need in order to meet

your treatment goals. If psychotherapy is begun, I will usually schedule one 50-minute session (one appointment hour of 50 minutes duration) 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 provide 24 hours (1 day) advanced notice of cancellation. Additionally, Insurance companies generally do not reimburse for missed appointments, and you will be responsible for your session fee (not just a co-pay). If it is possible, I will try to find another time to reschedule the appointment.

### **Professional Fees**

My hourly fees are as follows:

\$130 Initial Consultation

\$110 Individual Counseling

\$125 Couples or Family Therapy

However, if I am a contracted provider for your insurance company, your co-payment fee is \_\_\_\_\_.

In addition to weekly appointments, I charge \$110 (per hour) for other professional services you may need, though I will break down the hourly cost if I work for periods of less than one hour. Other services include report writing, telephone conversations lasting longer than 10 minutes, attendance at meetings with other professionals you have authorized, preparation of records or treatment summaries and the time spent performing any other services you may request of me. If you become involved in legal proceeding that requires my participation, you will be expected to pay for my professional time even if I am called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement, I charge \$150 per hour for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding.

### **Billing and payments**

You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise or unless you have insurance coverage that requires another arrangement. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to when they are requested. A monthly Super bill (summary of counseling sessions) can be provided for reimbursement purposes.

### **Insurance Reimbursement**

In order for us to set realistic treatments 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 will 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. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. I will provide you with whatever information you receive from your insurance company. If it is necessary to clear confusion, I will be willing to call the company on your behalf.

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. 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.

### **Contacting Me**

I am often not immediately available by telephone. When I am not available, my telephone is answered by a voice mail that I monitor frequently. I will make every effort to return your call within 24 hours, and if a more timely response is required, please indicate this in your message. If you are difficult to reach, please inform me of times when you will be available. In the event of an emergency, contact your family physician or a crisis hotline: (800) 999-9999. However, in the event of a life-threatening emergency, always call 911. If I will be unavailable for an extended time, I will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact, if necessary.

### **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, or I can prepare a summary for you instead. 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 rights 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 am prepared to discuss.

### **Confidentiality**

In general, the law protects the privacy of all communications between a client and a therapist, 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, disabled person is being abused, I may be required to file a report with the appropriate state agency.

If I believe that a client is threatening serious bodily harm to another, I may be 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 him or herself, I may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him or her or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.

These situations have rarely occurred in my practice. 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 with other professionals about this 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 that it is important to 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 above information, have asked questions as needed, and understand that the issues related to risks and benefits of psychotherapy, medical concerns, confidentiality, professional records, alternative treatments, length of psychotherapy, fee for psychotherapy, emergencies and obligations of psychotherapy clients.

If you have any questions and complaints regarding the practice of your psychotherapist, you may contact the appropriate governing board. For Marriage and Family Therapists, contact the Board of Behavioral Sciences at (916) 445-4933, 400 R Street, Suite 3150, Sacramento, CA 95814

Based on my understanding of the above, I agree to proceed with treatment.

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Suzanne Etheridge, LMFT		Date
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