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Therapy Guidelines & Consent

Welcome- I am sharing this information with you to clarify questions you may have, and help you make informed choices about the therapy I offer. Please read carefully, sign and return a copy to me, and keep a copy for yourself.

I welcome questions about the therapeutic process and our relationship. These may include questions about what you read here, what you can expect in our sessions, and my professional and educational background. Please feel free to discuss any questions with me at any time during the course of our work together.

The Psychotherapy Process

Psychotherapy is a collaborative process. I share my specialized knowledge and training to help you resolve your distress, decrease your pain, and promote your personal growth. Open and honest communication on your part is key.

The therapeutic relationship unfolds within an agreed upon set of conditions, boundaries, and policies. This insures a safe, secure, and professional relationship that supports your growth. This is what makes psychotherapy distinct from other relationships.

Therapists have an ethical responsibility to avoid dual relationships (when a therapist and client engage in a separate relationship from psychotherapy) whenever possible. Therapists have a legal responsibility to maintain boundaries to protect their clients well-being (it would not be appropriate for a therapist and client to enter into a housemate situation, sexual relationship, or business relationship). If a therapist disregards these legal responsibilities, please report them to their licensing board.

Because psychotherapy involves a substantial commitment of time, money, and energy, it is important to give close consideration to the therapist you choose. Consider your comfort level; do you feel safe, understood, and free to bring up any areas of discomfort or conflict? Do you feel your therapist is a good match, or balance, to your temperament?

My Theoretical Perspective and Background

Psychotherapists work in a variety of ways based on their training, life experience, and theoretical orientations. I tend to draw primarily from three schools of thought: relational, somatic, and social justice psychology. I make use of all of these approaches to help you fulfill your goals. Relational healing focuses on your relationship experiences across the life span, repairing injuries from the past, and helping you develop skills for more satisfying relationships now and in the future. Somatic therapy focuses on helping you understand the body/biological forces influencing your emotions and state of mind and, and offers you “here and now” tools to come back into balance and accelerate the healing process. Social justice therapy speaks to the ways your private troubles are connected to our collective troubles as a culture, and offers healing solutions beyond the individual, with powerful healing benefits. Please feel free to ask me any questions about my approach.

The Beginning and Ending Process

In our beginning meetings we will discuss the issues that have brought you to therapy. I will share my expertise, and honestly inform you if I have the experience to help you. During this time we can both decide whether we are a good client therapist match. If you decide that you would be better served by another therapist, I would be happy to offer you qualified referrals.

As for the length of therapy, this is hard to predict. More often than not, people get meaningful relief within several months. Some choose to end therapy at this point. Others decide to continue and embark upon a deeper level of growth. I tend to do long term growth oriented work, but am open to offering shorter term therapy. I work with people for as long as they feel the process is truly serving them.

If we continue to work together, you have the right to end therapy at any time. For the sake of a satisfying closure, I ask that you agree to have one or more sessions in which we discuss the ending and complete the process.

At any point in the course of your therapy, you may feel that you have met your goals, and are ready to bring the process to a close. In the ending sessions we would review your progress and discuss your future goals. I would be happy to see you for periodic sessions after our work has been completed. Some people decide to return for another phase of ongoing therapy at a later date, and that option would always be available to you.

Benefits and Challenges

Therapy may result in a number of benefits to you, including significant reduction in your distress, a better understanding of your personal needs and values, more fulfilling and enjoyable relationships, a greater sense of freedom and choice, greater self-acceptance and life satisfaction, and resolution of the issues that brought you to therapy. Working towards these benefits requires active involvement on your part. The process can be challenging, and involves recalling uncomfortable aspects of your

history and experiencing feelings like sadness, anger, grief, shame, and helplessness. As you undergo these emotions, it is important to remember that growth includes growing pains. As you undergo internal change as a result of this process, there can sometimes be unexpected results. For example your relationships may change, your work satisfaction may shift, and/or you may desire changes in your living situation. There is no guarantee that psychotherapy will yield intended results. With this said, if we decide to work together, I will do my part to help you reap the rewards of your therapy work.

Complimentary Approaches

In addition to psychotherapy, there are additional approaches that can be effective in promoting well-being. Some examples are: holistic medicine, holistic nutrition, exercise and movement, supplemental nutrition and/or medication, bodywork and chiropractic, spiritual practice, meditation, support groups, community involvement, social change work, career counseling, coaching, healing classes, education and reading about the issues you are seeking help with. These approaches may be used concurrently with psychotherapy, and may accelerate your healing process.

Meetings

We will schedule a weekly session at an agreed upon time and day of the week. If you find that you need another time, we can work together to change it. In most cases, meeting once per week is the best way to build the continuity, communication, and safety that is needed for growth. Occasionally, and in special circumstances, we may agree to hold sessions more frequently or less frequently. Sessions are 50 minutes in length and I will be prepared to start and end on time.

Session Fees

My current fee for a 50 minute session is \$140. We have agreed to a fee of _____. Longer sessions are pro-rated based upon this fee, as are other professional services, such as telephone conversations that last longer than 10 minutes. I also have a policy of giving myself a raise of \$5 at the beginning of each year, due to cost of living increases and increased expertise. I will give you a minimum of one month's notice. If you are paying a reduced fee, please notify me of any changes in your financial circumstances. We will periodically reassess your fee as needed, and make sure that it accurately reflects your economic circumstances.

Fees are due at the time we meet, unless we have agreed upon other arrangements. Payment by check and cash are accepted. Checks are to be made out to me. I ask that you prepare the fee prior to or at the beginning of the session, so that the end of your session is not interrupted.

If you have insurance coverage, please verify the specifics of your coverage. You are responsible for payment for your therapy. I will help you by providing you with monthly billing statements that you can submit for reimbursement. You are also responsible for arranging to receive reimbursement directly. Note: Insurance companies generally do not reimburse for missed sessions.

Cancellations

Working together involves a commitment on both of our parts.

- If you need to make any scheduling changes, I ask that you give me a minimum of 24 hours notice.
- During the calendar year, you may miss up to 3 sessions at no cost to you, as long as you give me 24 hours notice.
- I only accept last minute cancellations in cases of last minute illness or emergency.
- If you choose to cancel your session last minute for any other reason, I ask that you pay for the session.
- In cases of illness, let me know at the onset of any symptoms and we can be in touch about whether to cancel or reschedule.
- If you are receiving medical or dental treatment, and are not sure whether you will be well enough to meet, let me know as soon as you make the medical/dental appointment in question, and we can be in touch about scheduling.
- In cases of life threatening emergency, I will not charge you for a missed session.
- In cases of a last minute emergency which is not life-threatening we can discuss how to handle it fairly.
- If you plan to be out of town, or take a break from therapy for an extended period of time, I ask that you give me at least a months notice. We can discuss how to best handle it given the situation.

My intention with this policy it to be mutually respectful of everyone's time & encourage planning ahead.

Confidentiality

The confidentiality of everything you communicate to me is protected by law and may not be revealed to anyone without your written permission. There are a few exceptions to confidentiality that you should know about. Please note that these situations are very rare. Nonetheless, in the event that they are relevant, it is important for you to be well informed.

- When there is reasonable suspicion that a child, elderly person, or disabled person is being abused or neglected I am required by law to file a report with the appropriate government agencies.

- When a client threatens to harm herself or himself, I am required to act as necessary to insure his or her safety. *This would almost always begin with talking about voluntary options*, but if necessary, might include contacting family members or others who can help provide protection, seek hospitalization, call the crisis team, or as a last resort, involuntary admission to a mental health facility.
- When a client threatens serious bodily harm to another, I am required to take protective actions, which include notifying the potential victim and notifying the police.
- If a court of law issues a legitimate subpoena, I am required to provide the information specifically described in the subpoena. Disclosure *may* be required pursuant of a legal proceeding. In this case only the minimum information necessary will be communicated.

Should any of the above occur, if appropriate, *I will make every effort to fully discuss the situation with you before taking any action.*

Other risks to confidentiality involve the use of health insurance. Insurance companies usually require a diagnosis and dates of treatment. In some cases they may also require progress notes, treatment goals, and other records. I will always discuss any such requests with you before complying, and should you choose to proceed, I will only communicate the minimum amount of information necessary. Please be aware that although all insurance companies state that they will keep your information confidential, submitting a mental health invoice carries certain risks to confidentiality, privacy, or to future eligibility to obtain health or life insurance. You have a choice about whether to release this information to an insurance company or to pay for therapy yourself. You are welcome to discuss this choice with me, in order to arrive at a decision that works best for you.

I participate in ongoing consultation with seasoned licensed therapists, for my professional development. I sometimes discuss our work together if I feel it will be helpful to you. When doing so, I omit identifying information in order to maintain your confidentiality. Any professional with whom I consult is also legally bound to keep the information confidential. Both law and the standards of my profession require that I keep records of our sessions. My notes are usually brief and include the problems and goals that you are working on, the dates that we have met, and any special issues that come up. I also keep a record of the payments that you make, and if applicable, any insurance receipts, copies of letters that I have written on your behalf, and releases of information that you have signed. *These notes are just as confidential as what we talk about in sessions and they are kept secured in locked files.*

Adjunct Treatment Providers

If you engage in a simultaneous therapeutic relationship with another therapeutic provider- such as a couple's or family therapist, or a psychiatrist, please let me know the name of the provider and the nature of the services. Together we can decide if a consultation with them will be beneficial to our work

together. The law requires that I have a signed release of information before I can consult with another treatment provider.

Litigation Limitation

Due to the fact that therapy often involves making a full disclosure of many matters which may be confidential, it is agreed that should there be legal proceedings (such as, but not limited to divorce and custody disputes, injuries, lawsuits, etc.), neither you (client) nor your attorney, nor anyone else acting on your behalf will call on me to testify in court or at any other proceeding, nor will a disclosure of the psychotherapy records be requested.

Mediation and Arbitration

All disputes arising out of or in relation to this agreement to provide psychotherapy services shall first be referred to mediation before, and as a pre-condition of, the initiation of arbitration. The mediator shall be a neutral third party chosen by agreement between myself and client(s). The cost of such mediation, if any, shall be split equally, unless otherwise agreed. In the event that mediation is unsuccessful, any unresolved controversy related to this agreement should be submitted to and settled by binding arbitration in Alameda County, in accordance with the rules of the American Arbitration Association which are in effect at the time the demand for arbitration is filed.

Contacting Me

If you need to contact me between sessions you may call me at any time at (510) 290-8303.

- Please let me know a few good times I can reach you in person.
- I will return your call as soon as possible, most often within 24 hours, with the exception of weekends and holidays.
- If you are experiencing an emergency, please tell me clearly on your message.
- If you are unable to wait for my return call, and need to talk with someone right away, you can call the 24 hour crisis support line at 1-800-309-2131.
- If needed, you also may contact the nearest emergency room and ask for the psychologist or psychiatrist on call.

Vacations

I will give you two weeks notice of my vacation plans and require that you give me a minimum of two weeks notice regarding your vacation plans.

My vacation schedule tends to be as follows: one week each season- winter, spring, summer, and fall. When I am on vacation, I will either check my messages every two days, or arrange for a trusted colleague to be available if needed. I will leave her/his name and phone number on my answering machine. I can also give you this information upon request.

Acknowledgment and Consent

By signing this form you are acknowledging that you understand and agree to the description of my services, and consent to therapy as described in this agreement.

Signature Date

Print Name

Address

Home Phone Work Cell E-mail