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OUTPATIENT THERAPY CONTRACT

Welcome to Seeking Serenity. 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 prior to your first session. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between us. I hold the following licensures in the State of Texas: Licensed Professional Counselor and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist.

SERVICES:

Therapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the Therapist and client, and the problems you bring forward. There are many different methods I may use to deal with the problems that you hope to address. Therapy is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, it calls for a very active effort on your part. For the therapy to be most successful, you must work on things we talk about both during our sessions and between sessions.

Therapy 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, therapy has also been shown to have benefits for people who go through it. Therapy can result in improved coping skills in relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. But, there are no guarantees of what you will experience.

Our first few sessions will involve an assessment of your needs. Using the information from you and the assessments; 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 commitment of time, money, and energy, so 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 find another mental health professional.

SESSIONS

I normally conduct assessments and evaluation within the first 2 to 4 sessions. During this time, we can both decide if I am the best person to provide the services you need to meet your treatment goals. If therapy is begun, I will usually schedule one 55-minute session per week. Appointment times are scheduled based on mutual availability and agreement. Once an appointment is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide 24 hours' notice of cancellation, unless we both agree that you were unable to attend due to circumstances beyond your control. In such a case, you will be expected to pay a \$75 missed appointment fee.

PROFESSIONAL FEES (See also Good Faith Estimate)

My fee per session is \$125. In addition to weekly appointments, I charge this amount 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 5 minutes, attendance at meetings with other professionals you have authorized, preparation of records or treatment summaries, and the time spent performing any other service you may request of me. If you become involved in legal proceedings that require 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 complex nature of legal involvement, I charge \$125 per hour for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding. Billing for my services begins 1 hour prior to the time I am required to report in court and continues for 1 hour following the time I am excused from court by the judge, summoning attorney or court officer. The additional hour provides me with time to negotiate travel, parking, timely arrival and any conversations that may be required of me before or after court.

BILLING AND PAYMENTS

You will be expected to provide payment for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise or unless you have insurance coverage which requires another arrangement. If your account has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements for payment have not been agreed upon, I have the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may involve hiring a collection agency or going through small claims court. If such legal action is necessary, its costs will be included in the claim. In most collection situations, the only information I release regarding a patient's treatment is his/her name, the nature of services provided, and the amount due.

INSURANCE REIMBURSEMENT

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 will fill out forms and provide you with whatever assistance I can to help 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. Of course, 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. 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 HMO's and PPO's 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 patients 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.

You should also 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 or summaries, copies of progress notes or copies of the entire record (in rare cases). This information will

become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored in a computer. Though all insurance companies 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 databank. 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 unless prohibited by contract.

CONTACTING ME

I may not immediately available by telephone when you call. For example, if I am with a client, I will not answer the phone. I utilize a mobile phone and my voice mail is confidential. I check messages throughout the day and in the evening. I will make every effort to return your call within 24 hours with the exception of holidays and weekends. If you are difficult to reach, please inform me of some times when you will be available. I am willing to utilize text messages to remind you of appointment times, confirm your attendance, to inform me if you are running a few minutes late or to request an appointment change in date or time (Reminder: 24 hours notice is required for changes to avoid being charged a missed appointment fee). To comply with HIPPA laws, I will not use your full name or refer to myself as your Therapist or mention counseling or therapy in a text. If I am planning to be unavailable for an extended period of time, I will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact, if necessary.

If you are experiencing a mental health crisis (having thoughts of harming yourself or someone else) please call 911 or the Crisis Line 210-223-7233 or go to your nearest emergency room and request a crisis assessment. **DO NOT SEND ME A TEXT IF YOU ARE EXPERIENCING A CRISIS.**

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 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. Patients will be charged an appropriate fee for any professional time spent in responding to information requests.

MINORS

If you are under eighteen years of age, please be aware that the law may provide your parent(s)/legal guardian(s) 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 with what I am prepared to discuss. Upon request, at the end of your treatment, I will prepare a summary of our work together for your parent(s)/legal guardian(s) and we will discuss it before I provide it to them. I require a copy of court orders for the treatment of minors that indicate custody arrangements and managing conservators with regards to treatment for non-invasive procedures.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In general, the privacy of all communications between a patient and a Therapist is protected by law, and I can only release information about our work to others 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/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 patient's treatment. For example, if I believe that a child, elderly person, or disabled person is being abused, I am required to 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 patient. If the client threatens to harm himself/herself, I may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection. These situations are not common. If I hear information that raises a concern about the need to make a report or coordinate an intervention, 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 a case. During a consultation, I make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of my patient. 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. If you request, I will provide you with relevant portions or summaries of the state laws regarding these issues. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and agree to abide by its terms during our professional relationship.

CLIENT(S)

DATE

THERAPIST

DATE