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PRACTICE POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Welcome to my practice. I appreciate the opportunity to meet you and provide recommendations for the best course of treatment for you. Please read this document and discuss any questions or concerns you might have about the information it contains.

WHAT IS PSYCHOTHERAPY?

Psychotherapy is a unique relationship between a patient and their therapist. It involves a comprehensive examination of the issues causing you distress as well as an implementation of therapeutic techniques. Selection of such techniques depends on your specific needs and the particular problems you are experiencing. In general, however, it can only be successful if you take an active role in the therapeutic process.

It is important to know that psychotherapy has both benefits and risks. It often leads to a reduction in emotional distress, better relationships, and improved problem solving skills. However, in order to bring about those positive changes, there may be times when you must discuss unpleasant issues, resulting in uncomfortable feelings such as sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. Know that in order to reach your therapeutic goals, you may have to address such aspects in your life, as they likely are what interfere with life satisfaction and happiness.

Our first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. Psychotherapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so it is important you feel comfortable with our meetings. If there happen to be concerns raised which can't seem to be resolved, I will gladly make a referral to another mental health professional.

The length of treatment can never be predetermined. Termination of therapy ideally occurs when your issues have been adequately resolved. I recommend "booster sessions" a month or several months following the conclusion of treatment to ensure that your improvements have been maintained. Sometimes patients must return to therapy for a brief time as new issues may arise or old ones need to be readdressed.

If you wish to end therapy before the recommended course, please discuss this with me so that we can develop a mutual plan. Patients who end therapy abruptly may experience worsened symptoms which could create even more difficult situations for them. For this reason, it is essential you communicate any concerns you have about your therapy to avoid this.

CONFIDENTIALITY

I am ethically and legally bound to protect the communication between us. I, therefore, am only allowed to disclose information about our work together to other parties with your specific permission. However, there are a few exceptions to this requirement:

If I believe that a patient is at imminent risk of life-threatening harm to himself or herself, I must take necessary precautions to ensure their safety. This might include contacting a family member or significant other who could reliably protect them. I also might recommend hospitalization, which sometimes requires police assistance if the patient is unwilling to admit themselves.

If I have cause to believe that a patient will inflict life threatening physical harm to another individual, I am obligated to take protective measures. This might include contacting the victim or the police, or seeking hospitalization for the patient.

If I suspect physical abuse, sexual abuse, or neglect of a child by an adult who is or was serving in a care-taking capacity, regardless of whether that child is now an adult, I must file a report with the appropriate state agency.

If I suspect abuse, neglect, or exploitation of a vulnerable adult (i.e., elderly or disabled) with whom I have had contact, am examining, or treating, I must file a report with the appropriate state agency.

In most legal proceedings, you have the right to prevent me from providing any information about your treatment. However, 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.

I have provided the most common situations in which confidentiality may be breached. However, there may be other exceptions that arise which are unique to a patient's situation. It is important that we discuss any questions or concerns you may have about these issues.

PROFESSIONAL CONSULTATION

I may occasionally find it helpful to consult with other professionals about a patient's treatment. This ensures I am considering appropriate and effective approaches to treatment. When this occurs, I am legally and ethically required to disguise any identifying information about the patient in order to maintain patient confidentiality. The consultant has the same mandates against disclosing information about our discussion to others.

HIPAA

I am required by law to provide you with a document explaining HIPAA and how your personal health information will be protected. In addition, I am legally obligated to conduct a risk analysis of my practice and outline the procedures by which I ensure the security of such information. This is explained in a separate document as well, which I would be glad to share upon request.

HIPAA is especially concerned with personal health information being transmitted and stored electronically. Some patients prefer for me to fax documents such as treatment plans to insurance

companies (rather than send through the postal service) or they prefer communicating via email or text (rather than by phone). Please know that none of these options guarantee security.

In addition, you should know that I store email correspondence, billing information, and other clinically-related documents on my computer. My computer and email are encrypted and I have passcodes for all documents as well as for login access to my computer. Also, because my smart phone contains patient emails, texts, and voicemail messages, it is password protected. Please let me know if you have questions or concerns about this.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDS

Laws and standards of my profession require that I keep treatment records. You are entitled to review those records and I would be glad to share them with you upon request.

OFFICE HOURS

My office hours are Tuesdays and Thursdays, 9am to 4pm, and Saturdays 9am-12pm.

SCHEDULING APPOINTMENTS

My initial appointment is typically 1½ hours. Thereafter, I usually schedule one 45-minute session per week. This may vary depending on the issues raised, scheduling constraints, or financial limitations.

PROFESSIONAL FEES

My initial evaluation fee is \$375. My psychotherapy fee is \$230. In circumstances of financial hardship, I may be willing to negotiate a temporary fee adjustment.

Under unusual circumstances, I may have to charge for other professional services, such as attendance at meetings or telephone conversations, emails, or completion of paperwork taking longer than 10 minutes.

PAYMENT

I request that you pay for each session at the time it is held. I accept cash, check, or credit card (MasterCard, Visa, and Discover).

I ask all patients to provide credit card information which I keep on file, even if you plan to pay by other means. In the case of payments more than 30 days delinquent, I will use my discretion in charging the overdue balance to your credit card.

INSURANCE

I do not participate with any health insurance companies. However, some insurance carriers require prior authorization before treatment begins and/or they require authorization for additional sessions throughout the course of treatment. Please be made aware of your particular plan's guidelines. I will be glad to complete all paperwork your carrier requires for this purpose.

You should be aware that some insurance companies require treatment plans or summaries, including a clinical diagnosis or, in very rare cases, copies of the entire medical record. This

information will become part of the insurance company's files and probably will be stored in a computer. Although all insurance companies claim they maintain confidentiality of records, I have no control over what they do with it once they receive it. In some cases they may share the information with a national information data bank.

It is important to know that you can always pay for my services without seeking insurance reimbursement. In this case, you would not have to request treatment authorization nor would I have to complete any insurance forms.

BILLING STATEMENTS

Upon request, I would be glad to send you a monthly billing statement for your records and/or for you to submit to your insurance company. These statements I typically send electronically with passcode protection. Please let me know if you would prefer for me to send your statement via mail or give to you in the office.

MISSED SESSIONS OR CANCELLATIONS

Missed sessions or appointments canceled with less than 24 hours notice will be charged the session fee. If you do miss an appointment, it is important that you reschedule as soon as possible so that your usual session time is still available the following week.

INCLEMENT WEATHER

If MCPS has a delay or is closed due to emergency weather conditions, it is likely I will have to reschedule our appointment. I will contact you by phone and/or email to confirm.

CONTACTING ME

You can reach me on my cell phone (301.787.4459) which I use for all professional calls. You can leave a confidential message if I do not answer. During the business week, I will make every attempt to return your call within 24 hours; otherwise, I will return your call the next business day. If it is difficult to reach you please leave several times during which you would be available.

During vacation or other absences from the office, I typically have another mental health professional covering for me. I will inform you of such absences and I will provide you with the name and phone number of that person to contact in case of emergency. I also will leave such information on my voicemail message. Feel free to leave any nonemergency messages on my voicemail, which I will respond to upon my return.

EMERGENCIES

If you are having an emergency, try my cell phone. If you cannot contact me (or the person covering for me during a scheduled absence), call your psychiatrist or family physician. If you still are unable to reach anyone, and it is a true emergency, call 911, or go to the nearest emergency room.

Thank you for coming to my practice. I look forward to working with you.

Kathryn Steinman, Psy.D.