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Practice Policies and Informed Consent for Professional Services

Below, you will find helpful information about therapeutic services, evaluation services, other services, your rights as a client, and current business practices. Please read through the document and initial where indicated to convey your understanding of these practices. I will discuss this information with you at the beginning of your first session. Please note that the terms therapy and psychotherapy are used interchangeably throughout this document.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES- *What to expect from psychotherapy*

Therapy is a relationship between people that works in part because of clearly defined rights and responsibilities held by each person. As a client in therapy, you have certain rights and responsibilities that are important for you to understand. There are also legal limitations to those rights of which you should be aware. I, as your therapist, have corresponding responsibilities to you. These rights and responsibilities are described in the following sections. Most likely, the first two sessions will involve a comprehensive evaluation of your needs. Understanding your concerns, problematic behaviors, feelings, and beliefs allows for an individualized treatment plan. By the end of the evaluation, I will be able to offer you some initial impressions of what our work might include and we will collaborate on an action plan. At that point, we will discuss ways your goals may be met.

Psychotherapy has been shown to have benefits for individuals who undertake it. Therapy often leads to a significant reduction in feelings of distress, increased satisfaction in interpersonal relationships, greater personal awareness and insight, increased skills for managing stress and resolutions to specific problems. Psychotherapy requires a very active effort on your part. In order to be most successful, you will have to work on things we discuss outside of sessions with “homework.” This keeps you moving consistently toward your goals. Additionally, change is a process, one that takes time and commitment. The more committed you are to your action plan, the more likely you are to be successful in treatment and reach your goals. While psychotherapy has demonstrated countless benefits, risks exist as well. Risks may include experiencing uncomfortable feelings, such as sadness, guilt, anxiety, anger, frustration, or loneliness because the process of psychotherapy often requires discussing the unpleasant aspects of your life. If these arise, your therapist will help you find effective coping tools to work through these emotions and make meaningful changes.

In addition, when working with children and problem behaviors, parents may very well see the unwanted behavior(s) increase (gets worse) before they decreases. It is important to be consistent and supportive during the challenging transition.

Limits to Confidentiality

Typically, everything you share with me and any information I become aware of about you remains completely confidential. This means that I am legally and ethically unable to share your personal information. Hopefully this will help you to feel comfortable discussing personal and distressing topics with me. If you would like me to release information, or if I believe releasing information to another person would be beneficial to treatment, you would need to provide your permission for me

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to do so in writing. However, it is important that you know the legal limits to confidentiality. These are situations in which I am not only *able* to release information without your consent, but I am required by law to do so. One instance is suspected or risk for abuse or neglect to children including physical, verbal/emotional, sexual abuse or neglect. This includes any material accessed online or otherwise that exploits a child under the age of 18 or children who witness domestic violence. If an individual who is classified as elderly (65 or older) is believed to have been subjected to abuse or neglect, I would need to report this as well. An additional limit to confidentiality is if you are at imminent risk of suicide or homicide or harming the property of another person. A further limit includes if you meet criteria to be considered gravely disabled, or become gravely disabled during our work together. Additionally, if I receive a court order or subpoena for records, I would be required to release your records. In other words, your information is confidential until, legally, it is not.

APPOINTMENTS

Appointments are up to 50 minutes in duration, once per week although for some clients, sessions may be more or less frequent. The time scheduled for your appointment is assigned to you and you alone. If you need to cancel or reschedule a session, I ask that you provide me with at least 48-hour notice. If you miss a session without canceling or cancel with less than 48 hours notice, my policy is to collect the full session fee. At your first appointment, you will be asked to **provide a credit card to be put on file in a secured, HIPAA-compliant electronic medical records system**. This card will be billed for no-show/late cancellation fees at the close of the business day on which your appointment was scheduled. You may also use this card to pay any fees (e.g., therapy sessions, consultation, and evaluation fees). *Please initial in the following space acknowledging that your card will be placed on file and charged for the full session fee if a no-show/late cancellation should occur.*

It is very important that you arrive to your appointment on time. If you are late, your appointment will still need to end on time. If you are more than 20 minutes late to a session, this is considered a “no show” as it does not allow for sufficient time to effectively conduct a therapy session. If you arrive later than 20 minutes after the start time for your session, you are responsible to pay for the session as it is considered a no-show and we will not conduct a session at that time.

PROFESSIONAL FEES

Therapy and Consultation fees are \$150.00 per 45 to 50-minute session unless you, the client, and me, Rhonda L. Smith, PhD, made previously agreed upon fee arrangements. Payment is due before the session begins and can be made by cash, check, Visa, Mastercard, and Discover. Please note that if a check is returned (bounced), you are responsible for the returned check fee of \$50. If session fees change over the course of our work together, you will be provided with notification before the change is implemented.

Evaluations include a consultation, testing, written report of the results for parents, or adult if an adult is being evaluated, to take home, and a session to review results, answer questions, and discuss the next steps for treatment, school, or services to consider. Each evaluation is individualized to the

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needs of the child and/or adult and therefore the total cost of the evaluation varies. I have provided estimates of the evaluation fees below:

Psychological evaluation \$900-\$1200

ADHD evaluations \$1200-\$1500

Psychoeducational evaluations (Learning Disabilities) \$1300-\$1600

If your account has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements for payment have not been made, I have the option of using legal means to secure the payment such as a collection agency or small claims court, which will require me to disclose otherwise confidential information. 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. If such legal action is necessary, its costs will be included in the claim.

Using Insurance

At this time, I am not participating with any insurance networks.

Other professional fees that may apply:

If you are in need of a treatment summary for others or need me to provide extensive consultation with other providers on your behalf, you may be subject to paying the full session fee, on a prorated basis charged by the quarter hour.

Fees for mandatory court appearances on a client's behalf:

The client-therapist relationship is built on trust and the foundation of that trust is confidentiality. It is often quite damaging to the therapeutic relationship for the therapist to be asked to present records to the court, testify in court or in a proceeding, and/or take part in court or deposition. I, Rhonda L. Smith, PhD, do not offer the service of providing records or testifying on behalf of clients either as a factual or expert witness. Court appearance will likely result in the need to terminate therapy and refer you to another therapist due to creating a dual relationship, which can negatively impact client care. It is strongly encouraged that you do not request or require your therapist to be involved in litigation on your behalf.

In cases where I, Rhonda L. Smith, PhD, am *ordered* to testify by the court about their therapy/assessment/treatment with you (even by a third party), I, Rhonda L. Smith, PhD, will be monetarily compensated as set forth below.

In the event that it is necessary for me, Rhonda L. Smith, PhD, to testify before any court, arbitrator, or other hearing officer to testify at a deposition, or to present any or all records pertaining to the therapeutic relationship to a court official, the client agrees to pay me, Rhonda L. Smith, PhD, for my services. An initial \$3,000 retainer is required to be paid in full 14 calendar days before testimony is scheduled or records are to be submitted to the court. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement, additional costs that are reimbursed to me, Rhonda L. Smith, PhD, at your expense include: travel time and travel expenses, meals, copies, parking, phone consultation, letter compilation, communication with my, Rhonda L. Smith, PhD's, legal counsel, and record(s) review

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at the rate of \$250 per hour, rounded to the nearest half hour. There is a minimum charge of eight (8) hours billed for each day that I, Rhonda L. Smith, PhD, am required to attend court, hearings, testimonies, and/or submit records to the court as all other clients will need to be cleared from my calendar for that day. The full day is billed to you even if the testimony, arbitration, hearing, or record submission is cancelled/postponed for that day or takes fewer than eight hours. Other letters and paperwork requested by the client will be assessed a charge of \$200 per hour, rounded to the nearest hour, with a minimum 1 hour charge. This does include letters to court officials or attorneys, and any other documentation requested by the client. This does not include copies of your bill, missed work or school letters, Release of Information Forms, or any other documents used in the day-to-day operation of the office.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDS

I am required to keep records of the provided psychological services that I provide. Your records are maintained in a secure electronic file that is highly safeguarded. Notes are brief and typically include your reasons for seeking therapy, the goals and progress, session topics, history, and your billing records.

COMMUNICATION OUTSIDE OF SESSIONS

Communication may be needed or helpful between sessions (e.g., for simple questions, scheduling). These communications are also completely confidential. You are able to contact me via phone and leave a message on my secure voicemail. I will do my best to get back to you within approximately 24 hours. If you are difficult to reach, please provide me with times you are available. You may contact me via email, but please be aware that while I take every measure to protect electronic communications, I cannot ensure that they are completely confidential. For your protection, emails should be brief and personal information should be limited. If you feel that you need to communicate information that is concerning, complex, lengthy, or that would be difficult to discuss adequately via a 5-minute phone call or very brief email, I will request that we meet in person to discuss the topic further. I do not respond to text messages from clients.

I will always respect your confidentiality and therefore will never search for you on social media outlets. Additionally, to remain within the professional bounds of our relationship, we are not able to be connected on social media sites (i.e., I am unable to accept friend requests, etc.), nor are we able to maintain relationships (business or personal) outside of therapy. If we see each other accidentally outside the therapy office, I will not acknowledge you first. Your right to privacy and confidentiality is of the utmost importance to me, and I do not wish to jeopardize your privacy. However, if you acknowledge me first, I will be more than happy to speak briefly with you, but feel it appropriate not to engage in any lengthy discussions in public or outside of the therapy office.

EMERGENCIES

In the event of an emergency or a crisis, call **911**, the Crisis Hotline **(520) 622-6000** or **1-866-495-6735**, or go to the nearest emergency room. If you call me and you do not hear from me or I am unable to reach you, and you feel you cannot wait for a return call or if you feel unable to keep yourself safe please call one of the above numbers or go to the nearest emergency room.

