

Cornerstone Counseling LLC

Client-Therapist Agreement

Welcome to Cornerstone Counseling LLC. This document (the Agreement) contains important information about our professional services and business policies. It also contains summary information about the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), a new federal law that provides new privacy protections and new patient rights with regard to the use and disclosure of your Protected Health Information (PHI) used for the purpose of treatment, payment, and health care operations. HIPAA requires that we provide you with a Notice of Privacy Practices (the Notice) for use and disclosure of PHI for treatment, payment and health care operations. The Notice, which is attached to this Agreement, explains HIPAA and its application to your personal health information in greater detail, and our practice is in general accordance with HIPAA policies. The law requires that we obtain your signature acknowledging that we have provided you with this information at the end of this session.

Although these documents are long and sometimes complex, it is very important that you read them carefully. We can discuss any questions you have about the procedures at any time. When you sign this document, it will also represent an agreement between us. You may revoke this agreement in writing at any time. That revocation will be binding on us unless we have taken action in reliance on it or if you have not satisfied any financial obligations you have incurred.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

Therapy is a relationship between people that works in part because of the clearly defined rights and responsibilities held by each person. This frame helps to create the safety to take risks and the support to become empowered to create change. As a client in psychotherapy, you have certain rights and responsibilities that are important for you to know about. There are also legal limitations to those rights that you should be aware of. Your therapist has corresponding responsibilities to you. These respective rights are described in the following section.

Psychotherapy has both benefits and risks. Risks sometimes include experiencing uncomfortable feelings, such as sadness, guilt, anxiety, anger, frustration, loneliness and helplessness. Psychotherapy often requires discussing unpleasant aspects of your life. However, 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 or managing stress, and resolutions to specific problems. But, there are no guarantees. Psychotherapy requires a very active effort on your part. In order to be most successful, you will have to work on things that we discuss outside of sessions.

The first sessions will involve a comprehensive evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, your therapist will be able to offer you some initial impressions of what your work together may include. At that point, you will discuss your treatment goals and create a personalized, initial treatment plan, if you decide to continue. You should evaluate this information as well as your own assessment about whether you feel comfortable working with your therapist. Therapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should be very careful about the therapist you select. If you have questions about our procedures, we should discuss them whenever they arise.

APPOINTMENTS

Normally an evaluation lasts from 1 to 3 sessions. During this time, you can both decide if your therapist is the best person to provide the services you need in order to meet your treatment goals. If psychotherapy is begun, your therapist will schedule one 45-minute session (one appointment hour of 45 minutes duration) at the frequency and time agreed upon.

CANCELLATION

Psychological services are most effective when meeting times are regular and consistent. A work or school excuse can be provided if necessary. The time scheduled for your appointment is assigned to you and you alone. **If you need to cancel or reschedule a session, it is required that you provide more than 24 hours notice. If you miss a session without canceling, or cancel with less than 24 hours notice, you must pay a standard fee for the missed session.** It is important to note that insurance companies do not provide reimbursement for cancelled sessions. In addition, you are responsible for coming to your session at the time scheduled. If you are late, your appointment will still need to end on time.

FEES, BILLING, AND PAYMENT

Psychotherapy sessions are 45 minutes and billed at a standard fee available by request or at the contracted insurance rate. Session fees or insurance co-pays are payable at time of service unless alternative arrangements have been arranged. Fees will be reevaluated periodically. **You will be responsible for paying the entire fee if your insurance fails to authorize units of service or if no units of service are available to you. Moreover, legal fees are not billable to insurance companies and will be charged to the patient directly (eg. court evaluations, court appearances).** Should a balance accrue and no payment is received, We reserve the right to seek remuneration by any means legally possible including, but not limited to, the retention of a collection agency.

INSURANCE

We accept payment directly from insurance companies, and therapists are participating providers on several managed care preferred provider plans listed on our website or available at the office. In the event that we are not a participating provider in your managed care plan, services may be reimbursable and we will provide you with a monthly statement upon your request that you may submit to your insurance to obtain out-of-network reimbursement. Insurance companies sometimes require a formal diagnosis with their claims. Diagnoses are technical terms that describe the nature of your problems and whether they are short-term or long-term. All diagnoses come from a book entitled the DSM-IV. There is a copy at the office and your therapist will be glad to let you see it to learn more about your diagnosis, if applicable.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDS

We are required to keep appropriate records of the psychological services provided. Although psychotherapy often includes discussions of sensitive and private information, normally very brief records are kept noting that you have been here, what was done in session, and a mention of the topics discussed. You have the right to a copy of your file at any time. You have the right to request that a copy of your file be made available to any other health care provider at your written request. Your records are maintained in a secure location.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The confidentiality of all communications between a client and a therapist is generally protected by law and your therapist cannot and will not tell anyone else what you have discussed or even that you are in therapy without your written permission. In most situations, we can only release information about your treatment to others if you sign a written Authorization form that meets certain legal requirements imposed by HIPAA. With the exception of certain specific situations described below, you have the right to confidentiality of your therapy. You, on the other hand, may request that information is shared with whomever you choose and you may revoke that permission in writing at any time.

There are, however, several exceptions in which your therapist is legally bound to take action even though that requires revealing some information about a client's treatment. If at all possible, we will make every attempt to inform you when these will have to be put into effect. The legal exceptions to confidentiality include, but are not limited, to the following:

1. If there is good reason to believe you are threatening serious bodily harm to yourself or others. If a therapist believes a client is threatening serious bodily harm to another, they may be required to take protective actions, which may include notifying the potential victim, notifying the police, or seeking appropriate hospitalization. If a client threatens harm to him/herself or another, a therapist may be required to seek hospitalization for the client, or to contact family members or others who can provide protection.
2. If there is good reason to suspect, or evidence of, abuse and/or neglect toward children, the elderly or disabled persons. In such a situation, a therapist is required by law to file a report with the appropriate state agency.
3. In response to a court order or where otherwise required by law.
4. To the extent necessary, to make a claim on a delinquent account via a collection agency.
5. To the extent necessary for emergency medical care to be rendered.

Finally, there are times when a therapist may find it beneficial to consult with colleagues for professional consultation. Your name and unique identifying characteristics will not be disclosed.

The consultant is also legally bound to keep the information confidential.

CONTACTING ME

Your therapist is often not immediately available by telephone. We do not answer the phone when with a client. If you need to reach a therapist between sessions, you may leave a message and your call will be returned as soon as possible or by the next business day under normal circumstances. After business hours Monday through Friday and on weekends, if you require an immediate response, it remains your responsibility to take care of yourself. If you feel unable to keep yourself safe, call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room.

OTHER RIGHTS

If you are unhappy with what is happening in therapy, we hope you'll talk with your therapist so that we can respond to your concerns. Such criticism will be taken seriously and with care and respect. You may also request a referral to another therapist and you are free to end therapy at any time.

You have the right to considerate, safe, and respectful care, without discrimination as to race, ethnicity, color, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, or source of payment.

You have the right to ask questions about any aspect of the therapy and about your therapist's specific training and experience. You have the right to expect that your therapist will not have social or sexual relationships with clients or with former clients.