



## Informed Consent for Psychotherapy

Welcome to my practice. This document contains important information about my professional services and business policies. Please read it carefully, and feel free to ask any questions you have. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between us.

### PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES

I am a licensed clinical psychologist in CA with a doctoral degree in clinical psychology, and I provide a range of psychotherapy services including assessment, psychotherapy, documentation, advocacy, and consultation. Psychotherapy is a process where growth, experiences, histories, symptoms, environmental stressors, and systemic barriers are assessed, explored, and addressed. There are many different methods I may use to approach whatever you hope to address. This process is collaborative, and I encourage your active participation. Therapy can involve ongoing sessions, assessment, providing documentation, interacting with other people in your health care team or community (when appropriate or needed), and holding space for your goals and healing.

Therapy can have benefits and risks. As therapy often involves difficult aspects of your life, history, and environment, you may experience uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, and overwhelm. Psychotherapy has been shown to have benefits for people who engage in it, and if it feels uncomfortable or harmful we can acknowledge this and remain in conversation about how we work together.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

I strive to protect the confidentiality and privacy of everybody I work with. In general, the privacy of all communications between a client and a psychologist is protected by law, and I can and will only release information about our work to others with your written permission. If it feels appropriate for me to talk to somebody in your world (partner, health care provider) we can complete a written release and discuss goals for the chat. However, 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 state is an important issue, a judge may order my testimony if deemed necessary.

There are some situations in which I am legally obligated to take action to protect you and others from harm, even if I have to reveal some information about you. If this occurs, I am required to contact the appropriate agency. I will always inform you about the process and work with you as we go through the process of the report.

-If you describe abuse towards a child, elderly person, or disabled person

-If you describe thoughts of engaging in serious bodily harm towards another

-If you discuss engaging in or considering acts of serious harm or death aimed at yourself

-If you disclose that you or others have accessed, streamed, or downloaded material where a child is engaged in an obscene sexual act

Sometimes we might discuss activities that are defined by our systems as illegal or might be deemed by some as high risk, such as use of substances, or sex work. I will always adhere to the above confidentiality policies and will not disclose any information you share unless required by law. In those events, I will limit my discussion of any activities that challenge our systems unless you consent to me doing so and we have a good reason for these disclosures.

Some content that you may want to discuss may conflict with mandated reporting requirements. I encourage you to ask questions or address subject matter so that we can decide together how to proceed in a way that offers the most care, safety, and structure possible around the subject or scenario. I realize this can be risky and stressful, and remain available to addressing the conflicts so that you receive support while the requirements are recognized.

I may occasionally find it helpful to consult other professionals. During a consultation, I make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of my client. 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.

I work with another therapist, Tim Lewis, Psy.D., as a back-up therapist. If I am ever ill or unable to attend an appointment and contact you directly, he may contact you to inform you of the change and next steps in re-scheduling. In the case of an emergency, Dr. Lewis may have limited access to your information for the sole purpose of maintaining your confidentiality and preserving any records on your behalf. All attempts will be made to discuss any disclosures with you beforehand, though given the unexpected nature of health crisis' and other emergencies, I cannot guarantee such notice will be given. I can offer contact information for Dr. Lewis if I am away for an extended period of time. He will be able to offer assistance and support if you are experiencing a crisis or concern while I am away.

I also work with a virtual assistant, Kyra Mingus, to assist with administrative tasks like updating bookkeeping and managing accounts. Kyra has access to your name, and if you receive superbills, may have access to your address and diagnosis. She does not have access to your records or any other personal information.

Additionally, I work with a billing person, Beth Jonasson, to make sure that my records accurately reflect what has been paid. Beth has access to your name, and if you use insurance, your address and diagnosis so she can track billing matters. She does not have access to your records or any other personal information.

Divergent Worlds Psychotherapy and Consulting is my private practice. Some record keeping and payment tools we use may occasionally display limited demographic details about you. No

personal history or information is ever available to any other practice member. Your information will be held as confidential and we all significantly limit access to shared information.

## MEETINGS AND SCHEDULES

I usually schedule one 50-minute session per week at a time we agree on, although the frequency can vary. Once an appointment hour is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide 48 hours [2 days] advance notice of cancellation.

My cancellation policy exists to honor the ongoing agreement we have to hold space for our appointments. It can be adjusted if we agree on an upcoming scheduling matter together. For example, if you have jury duty, we can schedule our appointment and cancel it without fees if you are called in. This is also true for pregnancy, uncertain work commitments, health needs, etc. If we re-schedule, alternate times will be held for 24 hours and if you have not responded, there is no guarantee that the options will still be available but we can still schedule them if they are. If cancellations and rescheduling becomes or feels regular or impactful to our process, we can discuss our options including adjusting our schedule or taking a break to include your current context.

Sometimes things happen and you might be late to a scheduled session. If you are able to let me know you will be late, that is always appreciated. I understand when that can't happen, and will see you when you arrive. After 15 minutes, if I haven't heard from you I may choose to engage in other things, and will update you if I will be unavailable. I will always attempt to return to whatever session time we have left if you are able to make it later in our session. I will charge for the full session time, and we can make use of whatever time we have remaining. If I am late for any reason, I will extend time at the end of our session whenever possible.

If you are paying for services through an insurance company, know that cancelled sessions are not covered by insurance plans in most situations. You will be expected to pay the full set rate if you have not cancelled in the 48 hour period. Beacon/SFHP insurance does not allow for paying the fee for a late cancelled appointment. If you use Beacon, we can communicate about missed fees and create a plan if more than 3 occur.

## FEES

Fees for initial appointments and ongoing sessions are based on my fee scale rates. I consider other services such as letters, other documents, and coordinating with other providers as part of the work we do together. At times if these services are regular and frequent, I may also charge a portion of this fee for them (such as telephone conversations which last longer than 15 minutes, repeated letters, meetings with other professionals, etc.). We can discuss these other aspects of our work and how they feel as we go. In some circumstances, you may become involved in litigation wherein you request or require my participation. I may charge a fee for professional time even if I am compelled to testify by another party.

I review fees at the end of each year, and typically adjust it by \$5-\$10 dollars based on cost of living increases. This adjustment will consider shifts to your finances and life circumstances. I may not raise the fee every year, and will discuss options if you are concerned about an increase.

Payment for each session is due at the time that it is held. Payment schedules for other professional services will be identified and agreed to when these services are requested. If your financial circumstances change, we may negotiate a fee adjustment and you are encouraged to ask at any time if you are thinking about raising or lowering the fee.

I accept payment via cash, check, or credit card. I will always aim to ensure that any payment is done as securely as possible. Credit card charges will be processed immediately and can be reversed if needed. Invoices have a 14-day period for payment to allow you time and space to pay, and ideally are paid after the session occurs.

For credit card processing I use Ivypay. Ivypay is a secure, HIPAA compliant service that allows us to have a credit card on file and automatically charge for sessions after we meet. I will enter in our session and you will receive a text message notice from "Ivy" then you complete the transaction. You are welcome to change the card on file at any time.

## INSURANCE

If you have a health benefits policy, it may provide some coverage for mental health treatment. I will assist you with accessing your benefits when possible. You (not your insurance) are responsible for full payment of the fee. If your plan is Beacon/SFHP, there is no co-pay or additional fees, however they have a yearly insurance renewal process that must be completed to renew your plan.

Managed health care plans such as Medi-Cal, HMOs, and PPOs are often oriented towards a short-term treatment approach designed to resolve specific problems that are interfering with level of functioning. Although a lot can be accomplished in short-term therapy, many clients feel that more services are necessary. If this conflicts with our goals we can discuss our options, including applying my sliding scale fee.

Most insurance plans require me to provide a diagnosis for treatment approval and reimbursement of superbills, and sometimes require additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or in rare cases, a copy of the entire record. This information will become part of the insurance company's record. All insurance companies aim to keep such information confidential, but once it is in their hands, I have no control over what your insurer will do with the information. In some cases, the insurer may share the information with a national medical information data bank. The Medical Information Bureau (MIB) is a central database of medical information shared by insurance companies. The MIB does not have a file on everyone, but if you have an MIB file, you can review it for accuracy. You can obtain a copy for free once a year by calling (866) 692-6901 (TTY for the hearing impaired (866) 346-3642) or by visiting the company's web site at [www.mib.com/html/request\\_your\\_record.html](http://www.mib.com/html/request_your_record.html).

As we begin, we can discuss your insurance coverage, what will happen if your benefits change, and how you can receive fee reimbursement if possible. You always have the right to pay for counseling services independently if you prefer to avoid involving your insurer.

## DIAGNOSES

As a psychologist I can and do provide diagnoses for a range of experiences that have been documented and categorized in the DSM by the American Psychiatric Association. Diagnoses can carry useful treatment approaches and communicate information to others, along with their associated stigmas. There are also other labels or ideas based on evidence or experience that I may use or reference that are not included in the DSM currently. In order to protect your rights and autonomy and to recognize the history of oppression often related to diagnostic systems, I often refrain from documenting a diagnosis until or unless it is needed or important to facilitate access to systems, resources or care. My records are not connected to any other systems and no information can be accessed unless I provide it directly.

Diagnoses can vary, and one provider's diagnosis may be different from another. This can be based on experience, bias, focus, and the relationships that we create. Diagnoses can also shift over time based on your circumstances, and the ways in which you and your body interact with them. If you have been given other diagnoses, I will review them and will include them if you feel they reflect you, and may change them if we feel they aren't currently applicable. I will always discuss a diagnosis with you before assigning one, work together on using diagnostic language in any documented record, and revisit it as we progress.

## CONTACTING ME

You can contact me using telephone, email, or text. I will do my best to quickly respond whenever possible, and I will make every effort to return your contact on the same day you make it, with the exception of weekends and holidays. If you have contact and scheduling preferences, please inform me of the best way to contact you and times when you will be available. If you are unable to reach me and feel that you can't wait for me to reply, contact your primary care provider, a friend, or a support line. Our psychotherapy agreement includes contact in between sessions, and we can continue to discuss how this works for us as we go. If between-session contacts become frequent or complex, or aren't feeling aligned with our goals, we can discuss that and adjust so that we both feel informed about our contact agreements.

## PROFESSIONAL RECORDS

The laws and standards of my profession require that I keep treatment records. You are entitled to receive a copy of the records unless I believe that seeing them would be emotionally difficult, in which case I will be happy to send them to a mental health professional of your choice. I recommend that you review them in my presence so that we can discuss the contents. You may be charged a portion of my fee for any time spent in preparing information requests.

## RELATIONSHIP THERAPY

I typically work with either individuals or relationships, and once we choose one we don't change to another method. If you are considering both individual and relationship therapy, we can discuss which option might be the best fit for us all.

While we may not engage in relationship therapy, there may still be times where your partners, friends, or family come with you to therapy. They can be there to offer support, or you can address specific concerns that are impacting you in your relationship, or in general. If someone joins your session with you, the fee will be your usual individual fee.

## MINORS

If you are under eighteen years of age, please be aware that the law may provide your parents the right to examine your treatment records. It is my policy to request an agreement from parents that they give up or minimize 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 and sharing some details would assist you in accessing safety. I will also provide them with a summary of your treatment when it is complete. Before giving them any information, I will discuss it with you, if possible, and do my best to address any objections you may have with what will be discussed.

## PHYSICAL HEALTH

Psychological symptoms often have a correlation with physical illnesses and symptoms. It may be helpful to work with a health care provider to address them as you also address mental health. Sometimes, prescription and non-prescription medications can have significant side effects that may be important for us to consider. I appreciate discussion of any medication, supplement, and drug intake so we can track and identify your experiences together.

At times I may suggest that it could be helpful to speak with a health care provider to address symptoms that appear to be impacting you. Health care systems can be difficult and overwhelming to navigate or access. I remain available to coordinate with any member of your health care team when relevant and necessary, and support you in connecting to care when I am able. I may also talk with you about signing a release of information so that I can coordinate services with your providers and support your health care needs. I will not coordinate with other health care providers, without explicit purpose and consent from all involved.

## ENDING THERAPY

Taking a break from or ending psychotherapy may be initiated at any time. At least one week notice is suggested so that a final session can be scheduled to explore the reasons for closing, summarize treatment, say goodbye, etc.... The timeline for closure can vary, from one session to several months depending on our length of time together, our goals, and the reasons for ending. This is usually a constructive and useful process even if it feels uncomfortable.

This information will always be available upon request in both hard copy and digital formats. Please feel free to ask any questions that you might have. I look forward to working with you.