



**DWELL CENTER FOR HEALING
OFFICE POLICIES, INFORMED CONSENT, AND GENERAL INFORMATION
AGREEMENT FOR PSYCHOTHERAPY SERVICES**

The Dwell Center for Healing is a non-profit organization that provides counseling, training, and groups. It is directed by Kelly Muhonen, LMFT #52613. More information about Dwell Center for Healing and its services can be found at www.dwellcenter.org.

Confidentiality

All information disclosed within sessions and the written records pertaining to those sessions are confidential and may not be revealed to anyone without your (client's) written permission, except where disclosure is required or permitted by law.

When disclosure is required by law

Some of the circumstances where disclosure is required by the law are: where there is a reasonable suspicion of child, dependent, or elder abuse or neglect; and where a client presents a danger to self, to others, to property, or is gravely disabled.

When disclosure may be required by law

Disclosure may be required pursuant to a legal proceeding. If you place your mental status at issue in litigation initiated by you, the defendant may have the right to obtain the psychotherapy records and/or testimony by your therapist.

Litigation limitation

Due to the nature of the therapeutic process and the fact that it often involves making a full disclosure with regard to many matters that may be of a confidential nature, it is agreed that should there be legal proceedings (such as, but not limited to, divorce and custody disputes, injuries, lawsuits, etc.), neither you (client) nor your attorney, nor anyone else acting on your behalf will call on your therapist to testify in court or at any other proceeding, nor will a disclosure of the psychotherapy records be requested.

When treating couples, families and minors

In couple or family therapy, or when different family members are seen individually, confidentiality and privilege do not apply between the couple or among family members. Your therapist will use clinical judgment when revealing such information. Your therapist will not release records unless so authorized to do so by all family members who were part of the treatment. In the treatment of minors (under age 18), the child has a right to a confidential relationship with his or her therapist. The parent or guardian who authorizes the treatment of the minor has a right to general treatment updates.

Confidentiality in emergencies



If there is an emergency during your therapy, or in the future after termination, where your therapist becomes concerned about your personal safety, the possibility of you injuring someone else, or about you receiving proper psychiatric care, s/he will do whatever s/he can within the limits of the law to prevent you from injuring yourself or others and to ensure that you receive the proper medical care. For this purpose, your therapist may also contact the police, hospital, or the person(s) whose name(s) you have provided on the intake form.

Health insurance and confidentiality of records

If you plan to use health insurance to cover your psychotherapy costs, disclosure of confidential information may be required by your health insurance carrier or HMO/PPO/MCO/EAP in order to process the claims. If you so instruct your therapist, only the minimum necessary information will be communicated to the carrier. Unless authorized by you explicitly, the psychotherapy notes will not be disclosed to your insurance carrier. Your therapist has no control or knowledge over what insurance companies do with the information s/he submits. Submitting a mental health invoice for reimbursement carries a risk to confidentiality, privacy, or future eligibility to obtain insurance.

Confidentiality of online, cell phone and fax communication

Online, cell phone, and fax communications can be relatively easily accessed by unauthorized people, and hence, the privacy and confidentiality of such communication can be easily compromised. Please discuss with your therapist at the beginning of treatment if you decide to avoid or limit in any way the use of any mode of communication. Please do not use email in emergency situations.

Consulting

A licensed therapist regularly consults with colleagues regarding his/her clients to insure optimal care. However, the client's name or other identifying information is never mentioned. An intern practices under the license of his or her supervisor. If it is clinically necessary, the intern may disclose your identity to his or her supervisor. When appropriate, therapists consult, collaborate with, and refer to other health care professionals in order to improve and protect your health and welfare.

Releasing confidential information

Considering all of the above exclusions, if appropriate, upon your request, with your written consent, your therapist will release information to any agency/person you specify unless your therapist concludes that releasing such information might be harmful in any way.

Respecting the privacy of other clients

Please respect the privacy of those you see at or around the therapy office. Please refrain from inquiring about who they see for therapy or why. Also, please do not reveal to others that you saw him/her/them at the Dwell Center for Healing office.



Telephone and emergency procedures

If you need to contact your therapist between sessions, please email your therapist or leave a voicemail. Email communication is preferred. Calls and emails are generally returned within 36 hours, Mondays through Thursdays. Calls and emails made Friday-Sunday will generally be returned the following Monday. Your therapist will also discuss text communications in your session. Calls, emails, and texts are primarily to schedule sessions and are not intended to further therapeutic progress or treatment.

In non-emergency situations, phone calls between sessions will be limited to ten minutes or less. In emergency situations, if an in-person session is not possible, a phone session may be appropriate, and the client will be charged the usual session fee.

If an emergency situation arises, please indicate it clearly in your message.

If you need help immediately, please call 911 or go to your local hospital emergency room. Do not wait for your therapist's return call.

When your therapist is out of the office

Your therapist will discuss in advance when s/he plans to be out of the office. When your therapist is away, a phone session or an appointment with an alternative therapist may be possible as appropriate. When your therapist is away, s/he will not be available to return unplanned communication. Another therapist will be available for support, and your therapist will provide his/her contact information in event of an emergency. Your therapist will return communication upon return to the office.

In the event your therapist is ill, s/he will contact you to cancel the session. As able and as needed, s/he will reschedule either in person or over the phone as soon as possible. Session fees will not be waived in the event of a therapist cancellation and reschedule.

Therapy via telephone or internet

If you plan to participate in therapy via telephone or via the Internet, recognize that confidentiality can also be compromised. While this may enhance the availability or quality of the therapeutic experience, there are also clinical limitations that can have adverse effects on the therapeutic relationship or process. If phone sessions or the internet are regular, you will be asked to sign the telemedicine consent form. Phone or Internet sessions are to be scheduled and agreed upon in advance.

Payments and insurance reimbursement

You are expected to pay the fee of \$_____ per 45-50 minute session at the beginning of each session or in advance, as agreed upon with your therapist. If the standard rate is beyond your means, you can discuss sliding scale availability and eligibility with your therapist. The fee is payable by cash, check, or credit card. Credit card payments must be made in advance of the session. If a check is returned for any reason, you are responsible for the original amount plus a \$25 fee.



Telephone conversations, report writing and reading, longer sessions, travel time and so forth will be charged at the same rate, unless indicated and agreed otherwise.

All clients should expect a small annual increase in the fee.

Clients who want to utilize insurance should remember that professional services are rendered and charged to the clients and not to the insurance companies. Unless agreed upon differently, your therapist will provide you with a copy of your receipt on a monthly basis, which you can then submit to your insurance company for reimbursement. Not all issues/conditions/problems that are the focus of psychotherapy are reimbursed by insurance companies. It is your responsibility to verify the specifics of your coverage. In the event that your account is overdue (unpaid) and there is no agreement on a payment plan, an administrator responsible for billing will contact you. Your therapist may also use other legal means (collection agency, etc.) to obtain payment. Your therapist may also terminate treatment due to non-payment of fees.

Mediation and arbitration

All disputes arising out of or in relation to this agreement to provide psychotherapy services shall be referred to mediation before, and as a precondition of, the initiation of arbitration. The mediator shall be a neutral third party chosen by agreement of therapist and client. The cost of such mediation, if any, shall be split equally, unless otherwise agreed. In the event that mediation is unsuccessful, any unresolved controversy related to this agreement should be submitted to and settled by binding arbitration in accordance with the rules of the American Arbitration Association.

The process of therapy

Participation in therapy can result in a number of benefits to you, including improving interpersonal relationships and resolution of the specific concerns that led you to seek therapy. Working toward these benefits, however, requires effort on your part.

Psychotherapy requires your very active involvement, honesty, and openness in order to change your thoughts, feelings and/or behavior. Your therapist will ask for your feedback and views on your therapy, its progress, and other aspects of the therapy and will expect you to respond openly and honestly. Sometimes more than one approach can be helpful in dealing with a certain situation.

During therapy remembering or talking about unpleasant events, feelings or thoughts can result in your experiencing considerable discomfort or strong feelings of anger, sadness, worry, fear and so forth, or experiencing anxiety, depression, insomnia and so forth. Your therapist may challenge some of your assumptions or perceptions, or propose different ways of looking at, thinking about, or handling situations that can cause you to feel quite upset, angry, depressed, challenged or disappointed. Attempting to resolve issues that brought you to therapy in the first place, such as personal or interpersonal relationships, may result in changes that were not originally intended.

Psychotherapy may result in decisions about changing behaviors, employment, substance use, schooling, housing or relationships. Sometimes a decision that is positive for one family member is viewed quite negatively by another family member.



Change will sometimes be easy and swift, but more often it will be slow and even frustrating. There is no guarantee that psychotherapy will yield positive or intended results. Decisions on the status of your personal relationships and life choices are ultimately your responsibility.

During the course of therapy, your therapist is likely to draw on various psychological approaches according, in part, to the problem that is being treated and his/her assessment of what will best benefit you. These approaches include psychodynamic, cognitive-behavioral, family system, developmental, existential as well as an integration of spiritual practices and beliefs. You have the right to ask about the therapist's professional qualifications, theoretical orientation, experience, specialties, and length of time in practice.

Discussion of treatment plan

Within a reasonable period of time after the initiation of therapy, your therapist will discuss with you (client) his/her working understanding of the problem, an initial treatment plan, therapeutic objectives, and view of the possible outcomes of treatment. If you have any unanswered questions about the course of your therapy, the possible risks, your therapist's expertise in employing certain techniques or about the treatment plan, please ask and you will be answered fully. You also have the right to ask about other treatments for your condition and their risks and benefits. If you could benefit from any treatment that your therapist does not provide, s/he has an ethical obligation to assist you in obtaining those treatments.

As set forth above, after a couple of sessions, your therapist will assess if s/he can be of benefit to you. If s/he does not think s/he has the tools to help, s/he will give you referrals that you can contact. If you request it and authorize it in writing, your therapist will talk to the psychotherapist of your choice in order to help with the transition. If, at any time, you want another professional's opinion or wish to consult with another therapist, your therapist will assist you in finding a qualified professional. If your therapist has your written consent, s/he will provide him or her with the essential information needed.

Termination

While you are free to terminate your counseling or therapy at any time, please discuss your desire to end treatment in advance with your therapist. This allows you an important opportunity to review progress and create a plan for continued growth after treatment ends. In the event of longer term work, it is in your best interest to collaborate with your therapist to create a closure plan well in advance of termination.

If, at any point during therapy, your therapist assesses that s/he is not effective in helping you reach the therapeutic goals, if continuing treatment is clinically inappropriate or ethically inadvisable, if there is a conflict of interest or non-compliance with treatment, or if it is reasonably clear that you are not benefiting from therapy, s/he will discuss this



with you and, if appropriate, terminate treatment. In such a case, s/he can give you referrals that may be of help to you.

Dual relationships

Therapy works best when you and your therapist develop a good working relationship, based on mutual trust, honesty, and respect. Many clients choose to see a therapist because they know of him/her before entering into therapy with him/her and/or are aware of his/her stance on relevant topics.

Part of what makes therapy particularly effective is the fact that your therapist is not involved in your social, professional or familial interactions. Your therapist's goal is to keep the therapeutic relationship separate from other relationships that would impede therapeutic progress.

Not all dual relationships are unethical or avoidable. In this age of social networking, some affiliations may occur indirectly. Your therapist will assess carefully before entering into nonsexual and non-exploitative dual relationships with clients. Dual or multiple relationships can enhance therapeutic effectiveness but can also detract from it and often it is impossible to know that ahead of time. Nevertheless, your therapist will discuss with you, his/her client(s), the often-existing complexities, potential benefits and difficulties that may be involved in such relationships.

It is your, the client's, responsibility to communicate to your therapist if a dual relationship becomes uncomfortable for you in any way. Your therapist will listen carefully and respond to your feedback. If the dual relationship is interfering with the therapeutic process, you or your therapist can discontinue an avoidable dual relationship to preserve the therapeutic relationship. If the dual relationship is unavoidable, or in the interest of therapeutic growth, you or your therapist may determine that termination of therapy is most beneficial. In this case, your therapist can offer referrals to other professionals.

Therapy never involves sex or any other dual relationship that impairs your therapist's objectivity, clinical judgment, therapeutic effectiveness or is exploitative in nature.

Cancellation

Since scheduling an appointment involves the reservation of time specifically for you, a minimum of 24-hour notice is required for rescheduling or cancelling an appointment.

The full fee will be charged for sessions missed without at least 24 hour notification.

In the case of illness or unexpected emergencies that arise within 24 hours of your appointment, your therapist may be able to offer either a phone session during your scheduled time or an alternative available appointment within the week. If your therapist is not available, the full fee will be charged.

If you arrive late to a session, your appointment will not be extended or rescheduled.

Clients seen every other week are expected to maintain a consistent schedule.

Repeated rescheduling or cancelling of appointments can compromise treatment. If a client repeatedly misses or reschedules appointments (our norm is no more than three



times per year), your therapist may reevaluate with you your commitment to treatment or may suggest termination if treatment is significantly compromised by regular absences or rescheduling.

I have read the above Office Policies, Informed Consent, and General Information Agreement. I understand them and agree to comply with them.

Client name (print) _____

Date _____

Signature _____

Therapist Name _____

Date _____

Signature _____