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### A General Introduction to Psychotherapy

Entering therapy usually comes with feeling curious or uncertain about what to expect. In general, “talk therapy” is a process that usually takes a minimum of several weeks (although usually longer) with meetings at least once per week. We’ll address together whatever may be on your mind. We’ll attempt to enhance your life, by way of understanding better yourself and others, as well as by direct problem solving.

Naturally therapy does not provide instant remission of your problems. (In fact, the process of discussing your life and experiences sometimes results in temporarily feeling worse— on the way to working out unresolved pain and conflicts, discovering new resources for adjusting and coping with your life, and working out solutions to difficulties you face in the present.) However, a great deal of research indicates that the vast majority of people who pursue psychotherapy report significant improvement and benefits to their lives.

In order for psychotherapy to provide maximum benefits, it is important for you to understand and agree upon the basic parameters of our therapy relationship. Please take the time to read the following information. If you would like to discuss this introduction, or have an other questions, please let me know. I will be happy discuss anything further with you.

Video Therapy: Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, I’ve worked with the majority of my patients electronically, either by internet or by phone. If you and I meet electronically, it’s important to find a safe, private, secured place so you’ll be able to speak and listen without distractions.

Confidentiality: Privacy is an essential aspect of the therapeutic relationship, and psychologists guard this information quite carefully. The nature and content of our conversations is private and strictly confidential. The confidentiality of therapeutic communications is also protected both by professional ethics, and by law.

There are certain exceptions to these parameters, however. Sometimes you and I might agree that it would be helpful for me to disclose information about your therapy. This certainly would include your insurance company, if you decide to use those benefits. In other cases, we might agree for me to communicate with your physician, attorney, or a family member.

California state law actually *mandates* that normal confidentiality rules be **suspended** in the following cases:

- 1) You are in serious danger of harming yourself or someone else.
- 2) You indicate knowledge of, or involvement in, child abuse (physical, sexual, emotional, or meeting the legal definition of neglect).
- 3) If I observe or gain knowledge of elder abuse in the course of your treatment.
- 4) A court orders me to release your records, either because you have raised your treatment as a fact in a court case, or because your therapy was court mandated in the first place.

I would be *legally mandated* to take action to protect you or others (usually by filing a report with the appropriate authorities). But in normal circumstances, and we would discuss it thoroughly beforehand.

**Confidentiality in Family and Couples Therapy:** Confidentiality can become complicated if one person wishes to share information with me that they want to be kept confidential from their partner, or from other family members in therapy. While every person deserves confidentiality, it's hopefully apparent that placing me in a position of maintaining a "secret" from the other person(s) participating in the treatment can seriously compromise trust—which would ultimately interfere with a successful therapy experience. For these reasons, I find it is best for me to reserve the right to use my best judgment as to whether to hold specific information confidential from others involved in the same treatment process.

**Fees:** Your fee will be established at the beginning of our work together. The fee reserves a 50 or 75 minute space of professional time with me, and you are paying for that time. In cases where additional paperwork, or phone calls need to be made beyond our session time, you may be charged for that time if it requires more than 10 minutes of my time. In addition, your fee will usually be raised on a yearly basis.

**Reduced Fees:** In many cases, we may decide to meet regularly *more than once a week*, in which case your session fee will be reduced. You may also receive a reduced fee in certain financial situations.

**Leased Hours:** If we agree that you will be paying a significantly reduced fee the regular hour of your session will be considered "*leased*" to you. This means that you are responsible for payment of that hour, even in situations in which you do not use the hour. Missed sessions may then be made up, if scheduling is possible, at a different time in any given month, at no additional charge.

**Regarding Insurance Reimbursement:** If you'd like to use insurance benefits, I urge you to check with your carrier to find out exactly what the reimburse policy is.

***You should be aware that I do not serve on any PPO provider panels, so that any reimbursement you are entitled to will be at the out-of-network rate, and not the PPO copayment rate.*** You will receive a statement from me each month, including all the information necessary for you to file a claim with your insurance. Complete payment of your psychotherapy fees is normally due within a week of when you receive the statement.

**Please remember that our fee arrangement is between you and me.** Your responsibility to pay for your sessions each month is not conditional on when or whether your insurance carrier reimburses you.

#### **Payment of Fees:**

- I use an electronic app called IvyPay, which is designed for psychotherapy patients and is highly encrypted to meet HIPPA requirements. I will send you a request after our first session to enter your payment card information on the app.
- Payment by check is also possible, if you prefer.
- After each session, I'll process the fee for that session through IvyPay.
- If you need an invoice itemizing your sessions and payments, please ask.

**Missing Sessions:** Our meeting time is reserved for you, and will be held over for you from week to week, unless otherwise arranged. *Meeting regularly is essential to your receiving benefits from psychotherapy.* So while you are in treatment, our meetings should be a priority in your schedule. If you find you need to cancel a regular appointment, we'll try to reschedule it for the same week.

There will be no fee charged for a missed session *if* you arrange it with me at least 24 hours in advance, and within normal business hours. If you provide less than 24 hours' notice, and we are unable to reschedule the appointment, you will be expected to pay for the missed session. By the same token, if you miss a session without any prior arrangement ("no show"), you are financially responsible for the session hour.

**Emergencies:** As an independent practitioner, it's not possible for me to provide 24 hour emergency coverage. I do check my voice mail and email routinely between approximately 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. on weekdays, and several times over the weekend. Routine calls and emails will be returned during normal office hours. (If necessary, we can make special arrangements for me to be available to you during a crisis.)

**A Final Note:** People often wonder how to maximize the benefits and speed of psychotherapy. I suggest:

- 1) Push yourself to talk about the things that seem the most difficult to discuss. In general, it is beneficial to talk about whatever comes into your mind during a session, and “screening” may interfere. It is particularly important to share any feelings about the therapist or about the therapy that may arise.
- 2) Realize that honesty is essential. Please also be aware that self-conscious feelings, embarrassment, and uneasiness at different points in therapy are common, and may be lessened by talking about them.
- 3) Try to think about and use the ideas and insights you achieve in therapy between sessions. The more you integrate these things, the more effective your efforts to do and feel better are likely to be.
- 4) Avoid missing sessions, since continuity is essential to making progress.

I hope this clarification of normal procedures adds to your sense of comfort and safety as we embark on our work together. If you have any further questions or concerns, please bring them up with me. I welcome the opportunity to discuss any matter further with you.

Suzanne Lake, Psy.D.

I have read and agreed to the above...

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Referral Source: With your permission, I would like to thank the person/organization which referred you for psychotherapy, if you were referred.

YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

Referring person/organization \_\_\_\_\_, OR

Source of referral (e.g., internet, Psychology Today) \_\_\_\_\_

Scholarly Writing, Consultation, & Taping Waiver: Since I regularly write scholarly papers on topics related to psychotherapy and psychology, it is sometimes helpful to use material from the psychotherapies of people I work with to support theoretical points. In addition, it is occasionally desirable for me to obtain consultation with another psychologist concerning psychotherapy. In each case, identifying information is thoroughly disguised. In requesting your agreement, I want to stress this is purely optional and your answer will not affect our work together. Would you agree to allow material from your work with me (in a thoroughly disguised form) to be used in consultation, or for professional writing? YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

## Patient Information

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

City/State \_\_\_\_\_

Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Home Ph. \_\_\_\_\_

Work P. \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Ph. \_\_\_\_\_

Occupation \_\_\_\_\_

Employer \_\_\_\_\_

Date of birth \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Contact \_\_\_\_\_  
(Name and Number)

Preferred email address \_\_\_\_\_

I have read and agreed to the attached informed consent: Yes \_\_\_

Thank you!