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COUNSELING AGREEMENT AND INFORMED CONSENT

Dear new client,

I am looking forward to beginning our work together. I have a private practice where I focus primarily on treating people who are coping with addiction and family members of people with addiction. Before we start it is important that you read this document so that you have an understanding of what to expect during our work together. Please sign the document at the indicated space on the last page *only if* you have read and understood everything laid out here. I will sign the document as well, indicating that we are in agreement.

Qualifications

I am a licensed marriage and family therapist. I received an MA from Sonoma State University in clinical mental health counseling. Prior to that I received a BA in psychology from Loyola Marymount University. I specialize in addiction treatment. I have worked in addiction recovery as a meditation teacher for the past three years.

Fees and Insurance Reimbursement

You are expected to pay **\$100 per 50 minute session** at the end of each session unless we have made an alternate agreement. If you are unable to pay that amount we may discuss the possibility of an agreed upon reduced fee. If your ability to pay the agreed upon amount changes during the course of treatment we can discuss the issue and possibly change the arrangement.

Even if you are seeking reimbursement from insurance you are required to pay the agreed upon amount. I will provide you with a bill that you can give to insurance in order to seek compensation from them. Please note that not all insurance plans cover therapy with me or some cover only a limited number of session. The best way to find out if you will be reimbursed by insurance for my services is to contact your insurance provider.

Unpaid or overdue fees

If you have a balance due that is over 60 days late I reserve the right use a collections agency or file a claim in small claims court in order to seek compensation.

Confidentiality

Generally everything that you say in therapy is confidential. Usually, anything discussed in therapy will only be released to others if you sign an authorization form giving me your consent to release such information to specified people. However, there are some limitations to that confidentiality.

Limits to confidentiality

- If a client threatens to harm himself/herself I may need to seek hospitalization to ensure the safety of the client or to contact family members of the client or others who can help provide that protection.
- If a client makes a serious threat to harm another person I may need to seek

hospitalization both to protect the client and the potential victim. I may be obligated to warn the victim, contact someone else who could help protect the victim, and or contact the police.

- If you chose to pay using insurance I may be required to release information about your diagnosis for reimbursement.
- I may need to disclose your name and the nature of services offered to insurance or a collections agency if there are unpaid or overdue fees.
- In cases of criminal or civil liability I may be ordered by the court to release some information. If a client files suit against me I may release minimal information in order to defend myself.
- I am required by law to report any cases of sexual or physical abuse where the person is unable to protect themselves (i.e. children, elders, and dependent adults).

HIPAA

In my practice I comply with all HIPAA regulations. For a detailed description of how this affects our therapy please read the “HIPAA for Clients” document attached to this informed consent.

Seeing each other outside of therapy

In order to protect your confidentiality, if I see you in public I will not acknowledge you unless you acknowledge me first. It is best to keep any interaction to a minimum so that your confidentiality is protected.

While these limits to confidentiality do exist it is rare that they arise. If you have any concerns regarding them please discuss them with me. The legal issues regarding confidentiality are complicated. If need be I can always discuss with a lawyer any confidentiality issues that may arise.

Nature of Service

I will provide you with counseling that will focus on addiction treatment for yourself or help coping with an addicted loved one. I employ a client centered approach. Your well-being is always my number of priority. The nature of this therapy is different for every client. However, it often includes help setting boundaries, finding self-care activities, and setting goals. This therapy requires that you take an active role in it. You will be asked to participate in your own treatment.

24-Hour Clean and Sober Policy

I ask that you come to each session with at least 24-hours of clean and sober time. This is important to treatment because it is difficult to discuss important issues while you are intoxicated. If you do come to a session under the influence of drugs or alcohol I reserve the right to end the session early, in this case you will still be required to pay the full amount for the session.

Referrals

In some case there may be a need to refer you to another treatment professional so that you may get the best care possible. This might mean referring you to a different therapist, a psychiatrist, or other medical professional. It is the nature of addiction treatment that sometimes clients require a higher level of care than I am able to provide them. In these cases I will provide you with a list of referrals to inpatient or outpatient treatment programs that I think would better suit your needs. In the case of any

of these referrals I will discuss the possibility of them with you.

Physical Health

In addition to counseling it is important to keep up with your physical health. Physical health can greatly impact mental health. It is therefore essential that you maintain your physical health by seeing a physician or other medical professionals as needed. You are also responsible for keeping your body healthy by exercising, eating well, sleeping enough, and drinking water.

Risks and Benefits

Therapy has some potential risks and benefits. Clients will gain the most benefits out of counseling when they are actively participating in their own treatment. This means many things. It means complying with the policies in this document by showing up on time, being clean and sober for the appointment, coming with willingness and openness to discuss difficulties, and more. I do not promise any specific outcomes. However, it is my goal to provide you with treatment that will help you recover from addiction or cope with an addicted loved one. Hopefully by the end of our work together you will be better able to regulate your own emotions, have more mindfulness about your difficulties and triumphs, and have set goals for yourself and met them.

Over the course of therapy some difficult topics will probably be discussed. Uncomfortable emotions such as shame, guilt, hopelessness, or sadness may arise as a result of our work. I will always do my best to offer you support in dealing with these feelings. If these feelings become more than we can handle together I will refer you to the correct level of care.

Limitations of therapy

As a therapist there are some limitations to the work we will do together. I will practice only within my scope of practice and scope of competency. This means that I will provide you only with therapy that I am competent to give. I will not test out new methods or techniques with you without obtaining the proper education and experience first.

Therapy is also limited in that it achieves the best results when you put the most into it. If you do not take it seriously, refuse to do the work, or are resistant to your own treatment you will probably see very limited results.

Alternatives to Therapy

There are always alternatives to therapy. You might decide that counseling is not the way to address your needs. Some of the alternatives include: inpatient or outpatient treatment, medical detox, medical help, hypnosis, bio-feedback, neuro-feedback, psychiatric care, or others.

Scheduling

In the first few sessions we will establish a weekly meeting time that works best for us both. Appointments are 50 minutes long and generally we meet once a week. You are expected to show up on time for your session. I do not provide an exact number of sessions because the length of therapy depends on the clients needs. I generally ask that clients agree to sticking with the therapy for at least 10 sessions.

Cancellation and No-Shows

If you are more than 20 minutes late without calling I will consider it a “no-show” and you will

be charged the full fee for the session. If you have to cancel the session for any reason you must call me before **5pm the previous business day**. If you contact me after this time you will be charged the full fee for the session.

If I ever need to cancel your session I will try to let you know before 5pm on the previous business day. In the rare case I need to cancel due to an unforeseeable emergencies I will let you know as soon as possible.

Vacations

If I am going on vacation I will let you know two weeks before my scheduled departure. I am not available to take calls or respond to emails while on vacation. Prior to my leaving we will schedule our next appointment. I will provide you with a colleague who can be a contact in case you have a personal emergency while I am away.

If you are going on vacation I ask that you let me know two weeks before your departure date. Also, let me know the date you intend to resume treatment. That way I can schedule my appointments accordingly.

Contacting Me

It is important to remember that during our session and in my office is the best way to communicate with me in a confidential manner. I will of course do everything I can to make sure our communication is confidential. However, I will not be able to ensure your confidentiality via phone, text, or email. It is therefore **advised that you do not send confidential information via phone, text, or email**. I ask that you mainly contact me for scheduling needs or in the rare case of a personal emergency. If you are in physical danger and unable to reach me please call 911.

Phone

I will generally respond to phone calls on business days and not weekends unless you contact me with a serious personal emergency with which you absolutely require my help. I will respond to phone calls within 24 hours (on business days) from when the call was received. If you do not hear back from me within 24 hours please assume I did not receive your call and try me again.

Text

My response time for text is generally the same as it is for phone calls. I cannot ensure your confidentiality via text. I will do everything I can to keep them confidential. However, as stated above, I advise that you use text only for scheduling and not for communicating private information.

Email

My response time for email is the same as it is for text and phone. I will respond within 24 hours of receiving it, on business days. If it takes me longer than this to respond please assume I did not get it and try calling me. I cannot ensure your confidentiality over email. I will of course do everything I can to keep our communication private but it is advised that you do not send sensitive subject matter via email. Please put in the subject line a description of the purpose for the email.

Fees for Phone, Text, or Email

If we have a conversation via one of these mediums that takes more than ten minutes you will be charged a full fee of \$100 as if we had a session. I therefore advise that you save any lengthy discussions for during your scheduled session time.

Termination

Inevitably the therapy relationship will end. When we are coming to a close of our time together I will discuss with you when and how we will end therapy. I ask that we terminate therapy in a mutually respectful way. If you feel your time in therapy is coming to an end I ask that you discuss that with me rather than terminating therapy abruptly. Termination of therapy can take as many as three sessions so that you feel there are no lingering issues before we end.

Grievances

Over the course of therapy if you have any grievances with me as a therapist I ask that you bring them to me so that we can discuss them. It can be difficult to talk to a therapist about what they are doing that is not working for you. Even though it is hard, I ask that you bring any issues to me so that I can address them and figure out how to best serve your needs as a client.

Procedures

Please arrive 5 minutes prior to your scheduled appointment time. You can sit in the waiting room when you arrive. I will come out of my office and call you in when I am ready for you.

The first two or three sessions are generally intake sessions. These are a little different than a normal therapy session because I am trying to collect background information and identify the presenting problem. During the first session we will spend about 10 minutes discussing this informed consent document. There will be time for you to ask questions so that I may clarify any lingering concerns. We will then spend the rest of our first session talking about why you are seeking counseling. The second session we will begin an intake questionnaire that will allow me to put the presenting issue into context. This questionnaire can take up to two sessions to complete.

I value your openness to counseling and look forward to starting our work together.

EMERGENCY CONTACT

 Name

 Relationship

 Phone Number

 Name

 Relationship

 Phone Number

Client and Therapist Signatures – PLEASE SIGN BELOW

I have received a copy of the informed consent. I realize that it is my responsibility to bring up any questions with my therapist. By signing this document I am agreeing to the terms of treatment and I am acknowledging my responsibility to know the facts contained in this document.

Client Print Name

Client Signature

Date

Therapist Signature

Date