

## About Psychotherapy

I believe you should feel comfortable with the therapist you choose, and hopeful about the therapy. Please make sure you read about me and about my approaches on my website [www.hnetworks.net](http://www.hnetworks.net).

Psychotherapy requires your active involvement. It requires your best efforts to draw on your existing strengths and resources as well as to make some changes that support your mental health and life goals. You and I may misunderstand each other at times but by communicating and adjusting our approaches, we can develop a therapeutic alliance that serves you well.

## Benefits and Risks

You should think about both the benefits and risks when making any treatment decisions. For example, in therapy, there is a risk that you will experience sadness, guilt, anxiety, anger, frustration, loneliness, helplessness, or other negative feelings. You may recall unpleasant memories, although my focus is primarily on the present and the future. The benefits of psychotherapy have been demonstrated in countless research studies and I have seen firsthand clients make improvements. Therefore, I enter our relationship with optimism about your progress.

## Confidentiality and Its Limits

It is your legal right that our sessions and my records about you are kept private. That is why I ask you to sign a *Release of Information* form before I can talk about you or send my records about you to anyone else. In general, I tell no one what you tell me. I do not even reveal that you are receiving treatment from me. In all but a few rare situations, your confidentiality (that is, our privacy) is protected by federal and state laws and by the rules of my profession. Here are the most common, albeit not all, cases in which confidentiality is not protected. As confidentiality law is very complex, I suggest you seek advice from a lawyer if you have special concerns not addressed here.

1. If you make a serious threat to harm yourself or another person, the law requires me to try to protect you or that other person. This usually means telling others about the threat. I cannot promise never to tell others about threats you make.
2. If I believe a child, elder, or handicapped person has been or will be abused or neglected, I am legally required to report this to the authorities.
3. If you were sent to me by a court or an employer for evaluation or treatment, the court or employer expects a report from me. If this is your situation, please talk with me before you tell me anything you do not want the court or your employer to know. You have a right to tell me only what you are comfortable telling.
4. Are you suing someone or being sued? Are you being charged with a crime? If so, and you tell the court that you are seeing me, I may then be ordered to show the court my records. Please consult your lawyer about these issues.
5. If a judge subpoenaed your records, I cannot guarantee that confidentiality will be maintained, although the legal system usually honors client-therapist privilege.
6. If therapy services are covered with your insurance then I will share information requested by them which typically includes: types of service, dates/times of service, diagnosis, treatment plan, description of functioning, and therapy progress. As part of cost control efforts, an insurance company will sometimes ask for more information on symptoms, diagnoses, and my treatment methods. It will become part of your permanent medical record. I will let you know if this should occur and what the company has asked for. Please understand that I have no control over how these records are handled at

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the insurance company. My policy is to provide only as much information as the insurance company will need to pay your benefits.

There are two situations in which I might talk about part of your case with another therapist. I ask now for your understanding and agreement to let me do so in these two situations. First, when I am away from the office for a few days, I have a trusted fellow therapist “cover” for me. This therapist is available to you in emergencies. Therefore, he or she needs to know about you. Of course, this therapist is bound by the same laws and rules as I am to protect your confidentiality. Second, I sometimes consult other therapists or other professionals about my clients. This helps me in giving high-quality treatment. These persons are also required to keep your information private. Your identifying information – name, age, etc. – is changed or omitted and they are told only as much as they need to know to understand your situation.

It may be beneficial for me to confer with your primary care physician with regard to your psychological treatment or to discuss any medical problems for which you are receiving treatment. In addition, Medicare requires that I notify your physician by telephone or in writing, concerning services that are being provided by me unless you request that notification not be made. See *Consent Form*.

Except for situations like those I describe above, I always maintain your privacy. I also ask you not to disclose the name or identity of any other client being seen in this office. If your records need to be seen by another professional, or anyone else, I will discuss it with you. If you agree to share these records, you need to sign an authorization form. This form states exactly what information is to be shared, with whom, and why, and it also sets time limits. You may read this form at any time.

If I must discontinue our relationship because of illness, disability, or other presently unforeseen circumstances, I ask you to agree to my transferring your records to another therapist who would assure their confidentiality, preservation, and appropriate access.

You can review your own records in my files at any time. You may add to them or correct them, and you can have copies of them. I ask you to understand and agree that you may not examine records created by anyone else and then sent to me.

### **Individual Therapy**

Individual sessions are usually 45 minutes long, which is based on what insurance companies reimburse for. Self-pay clients have the option of paying a pro-rated fee for a longer session.

Initially, most of my individual clients see me every week or every other week until significant progress is made, then therapy either ends or sessions are held less frequently. The length of therapy depends on client needs but my goal is to help people improve within a matter of weeks, not months or years.

Stopping therapy should not be done casually, although either of us may decide to end it if we believe it is in your best interest. If you wish to stop therapy at any time, I ask that you consider meeting for at least one more session to review our work together.

### **Referring to Other Services**

Another therapist: At any time, if you believe another therapist might be a better fit, I am happy to help you find other therapists in the area. If for some reason treatment is not going well, I might suggest you see another therapist or another professional. As a responsible person and ethical therapist, I cannot continue to treat you if my treatment is not working for you.

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Higher level of care: I work very hard to prevent you from needing a higher level of care, such as an intensive day program, respite, or inpatient hospitalization. If you have a history of requiring higher levels of care, then we should include relapse prevention planning into your treatment plan as well as make sure you are familiar with area resources, such as crisis services.

### **Collaborative Documentation**

I ask all my clients to review and improve upon my written documentation of our work together. I do this for several reasons: 1) I want to demystify what goes in your record by letting you see it and shape it; 2) I want us to be “on the same page” about your story, your needs, and your therapy goals; 3) I believe the process of reviewing notes together helps keep our work focused and productive; and 4) I want to reduce time spent doing progress notes between sessions so that I have more time for preparing for sessions, learning professionally, and coordinating treatment with other providers.

At the end of individual therapy sessions, I will ask you to take a few minutes to reflect on what we did in that session, how therapy is going, and steps you might take before the next session. While you do that, I will type up a draft progress note using my handwritten notes taken during the session. Then together we will review the progress note displayed on a screen in front of us. You can suggest changes or additions and we can fine tune next steps. You then have the option of taking a copy with you.

Before the second or third session, I will draft a written summary and develop suggested treatment objectives based on the initial assessment. In session, we will review and revise the written summary and treatment objectives.

### **What to Expect from Our Relationship**

As a professional, I use my best knowledge and skills to help you. This includes following the standards of the American Psychological Association, or APA. In your best interests, the APA puts limits on the relationship between a therapist and a client, and I abide by these. For example, if we meet on the street or socially, I may not say hello or talk to you very much. My behavior is not a personal reaction to you, but a way to maintain the confidentiality of our relationship. As you may already know, I can only be your therapist. I cannot have any other role or relationship in your life. As your therapist, I do not celebrate holidays or give you gifts; I may not notice or recall your birthday; and may not receive any of your gifts eagerly.

### **Our Appointments and Cancellation Fee**

An appointment is a commitment to our work. I consider our meetings very important and ask you to do the same. Please try not to miss sessions if you can possibly help it. When you must cancel, please give me as much notice as possible, preferably at least a few days notice. I try to do the same for you should I ever need to cancel an appointment. There is a \$25 fee when you miss or cancel an appointment, no matter the reason, with less than 2 hours notice. Insurance does not cover this fee.

Unless we make a prior arrangement, when you do not come to an appointment for over four weeks, I will consider the professional relationship discontinued. I will attempt to reach you by phone and/or in writing to see if you want to come in for an appointment so your treatment is not discontinued.

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### **Fees, Payments, and Billing**

My current regular fees are posted on my website and change periodically. Please pay for each session by its end. Because I expect all payment at the time of our meetings, I usually do not send bills. However, if we have agreed that I bill you, I ask that the bill be paid within 5 days of when you get it.

I realize that my fees involve a substantial amount of money, although they are well in line with similar professionals' charges. For you to get the best value for your money, we must work hard and well. I assume that our agreed-upon fee-paying relationship will continue as long as I provide services to you. I assume this until you tell me in person, by telephone, or by certified mail that you wish to end it. You have a responsibility to pay for any services you receive before you end the relationship.

Depending on your financial circumstances and total medical costs for any year, psychotherapy may be a deductible expense; consult your tax advisor. Cost of transportation to and from appointments and fees paid may be deductible from your personal income taxes as medical expenses. At the end of treatment, and when you have paid for all sessions, I can send you a final statement for your tax records.

### **Health Insurance Coverage**

Because I am a licensed psychologist, many health insurance plans can help you pay for therapy and other services I offer. Because health insurance is written by many different companies, I cannot tell you what your plan covers. Please read your plan's booklet under coverage for "Outpatient Psychotherapy" or call your insurer to find out what you need to know.

If your health insurance can pay part of or all of my fee, I can help you with your insurance claim forms. However, please keep two things in mind. First, I had no role in deciding what your insurance covers. You are responsible for checking your insurance coverage, deductibles, payment rates, copayments, and so forth. Your insurance contract is between you and your company; it is not between me and the insurance company. Second, you — not your insurance company or any other person or company — are responsible for paying the fees we agree upon. If you ask me to bill a separated spouse, a relative, or an insurance company, and I do not receive payment on time, I then expect this payment from you.

### **Statement of Principles and Complaint Procedures**

It is my intention to fully abide by all the rules of the American Psychological Association (APA) and by those of my state license. Problems can arise in our relationship, just as in any other relationship. If you are not satisfied with any area of our work, please raise your concerns with me at once. I make every effort to hear any complaints you have and to seek solutions to them. If you feel that I (or any other therapist) have treated you unfairly or have even broken a professional rule, please tell me. You can also contact the state or local psychological association and speak to the chairperson of the ethics committee. He or she can help clarify your concerns or tell you how to file a complaint. You may also contact the Massachusetts Board of Registration of Psychologists, the organization that licenses those of us in the independent practice of psychology.

As a therapist, I do not discriminate against clients because of any of these factors: age, sex, marital/family status, race, color, religious beliefs, ethnic origin, place of residence, veteran status, physical disability, health status, sexual orientation, or criminal record unrelated to present dangerousness. This is a personal commitment, as well as being required by federal, state, and local laws and regulations. I always take steps to advance and support the values of equal opportunity, human dignity, and racial/ethnic/ cultural diversity. If you believe you have been discriminated against, please bring this matter to my attention immediately.