

INFORMATION, AUTHORIZATION, & CONSENT TO TREATMENT

I am very pleased that you have selected me to be your therapist, and I am sincerely looking forward to assisting you. This document is designed to inform you about what you can expect from me regarding confidentiality, emergencies, and several other details regarding your treatment. Although providing this document is part of an ethical obligation to my profession, more importantly, it is part of my commitment to you to keep you fully informed of every part of your therapeutic experience. Please know that your relationship with me is a collaborative one, and I welcome any questions, comments, or suggestions regarding your course of therapy at any time. If your minor child/adolescent is the client, you are completing this consent on their behalf.

Background Information

The following information regarding my educational background and experience as a psychologist is an ethical requirement of my profession. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask. I obtained my undergraduate degree in Psychology from the University of Georgia. I also obtained my Master's of Education in Community Counseling and Ph.D. in Counseling Psychology from U.G.A. I am a licensed psychologist in the state of Georgia and have been in private practice since 2004.

Theoretical Views & Client Participation

It is my belief that as people become more aware and accepting of themselves, they are more capable of finding a sense of peace and contentment in their lives. However, self-awareness and self-acceptance are goals that may take a long time to achieve. Some clients need only a few sessions to achieve these goals, whereas others may require months or even years of therapy. As a client, you are in complete control, and you may end your relationship with me at any point.

In order for therapy to be most successful, it is important for you to take an active role. This means working on the things you and I talk about both during and between sessions. Generally, the more of yourself you are willing to invest, the greater the return.

Furthermore, it is my policy to only see clients who I believe have the capacity to resolve their own problems with my assistance. It is my intention to empower you in your growth process to the degree that you are capable of facing life's challenges in the future without me. I also don't believe in creating dependency or prolonging therapy if the therapeutic intervention does not seem to be helping. If this is the case, I will direct you to other resources that will be of assistance to you. Your personal development is my number one priority. I encourage you to let me know if you feel that transferring to another therapist is necessary at any time. My goal is to facilitate healing and growth, and I am very committed to helping you in whatever way seems to produce maximum benefit.

Confidentiality & Records

Your communications with me will become part of a clinical record of treatment, and it is referred to as Protected Health Information (PHI). Your PHI will be kept in a file stored in a locked cabinet in my office. Additionally, I will always keep everything you say to me completely confidential, with the following exceptions: (1) you direct me to tell someone else and you sign a "Release of Information" form; (2) I determine that you are a danger to yourself

or to others; (3) you report information about the abuse of a child, an elderly person, or a disabled individual who may require protection; or (4) I am ordered by a judge to disclose information. In the latter case, my license does provide me with the ability to uphold what is legally termed “privileged communication.” Privileged communication is your right as a client to have a confidential relationship with a therapist. This state has a very good track record in respecting this legal right. If for some unusual reason a judge were to order the disclosure of your private information, this order can be appealed. I cannot guarantee that the appeal will be sustained, but I will do everything in my power to keep what you say confidential.

In addition, you should be aware that I practice with other mental health professionals and that I employ an administrative staff. In most cases, I need to share protected information with these individuals for both administrative and clinical purposes such as scheduling, billing, and quality assurance. I also have contracts with typing associates who have a formal business associate contract with me that requires them to maintain confidentiality. All mental health professionals are bound by the same rules of confidentiality and all staff members and business associates have been given training about protecting privacy and will not release information without my permission.

Minors, Confidentiality, and Records

Clients under the age of 18 years who are not emancipated and their parents should be aware that the law allows parents to examine their child’s treatment records unless I believe that doing so would endanger the child. Because privacy in psychotherapy is often crucial to successful progress, particularly with teenagers, it is my policy to request an agreement from parents that they consent to give up their access to their child’s records. If they agree, during treatment I will provide them only with general information about the progress of the child’s treatment and his or her attendance at scheduled sessions. Any other communication will require the child’s authorization and consent, unless I feel that the child is in danger or is a danger to someone else. In that case, I will notify the parents of my concern. Before giving parents information, I will discuss the matter with the child if possible, and do my best to handle any objections he or she may have.

When a family is confronted by parental separation or divorce, it is very hard on everyone. It can be particularly hard on children. When the parental relationship is unsafe, it is even more important that therapy presents a safe environment. That safety is particularly endangered when a child has to worry that what he or she says will be revealed in court and used against one of his/her parents. In order to protect that safety, I want us all to agree that the therapist will not be called as a witness by either party. Everyone needs to understand that a judge may decide not to honor this agreement and that I may be required to be a witness, although I will try to prevent that from happening. Once we start treatment it is unethical of me to give any opinion about custody or visitation arrangements, even if I am compelled to be a witness. I request your permission to provide information to anyone who the court appoints to perform a custody evaluation or to represent the legal interests of your children. I will not make recommendations about that final decision.

Structure and Cost of Sessions

I agree to provide psychotherapy for the fee of \$250 per 45 minute session. Doing psychotherapy by telephone is not ideal, and needing to talk to me between sessions may indicate that you need extra support. If this is the case, you and I will need to explore adding sessions or developing other resources you have available to help you. I also charge this amount for other professional services you need, though I will break down the cost if I work for periods of less than 45 minutes. Other services include report writing, telephone calls that exceed 10 minutes in duration, consulting with other professionals with your permission, preparation of records or treatment summaries, and the time spent performing any service you request of me. The fee for each session will be due at the conclusion of the session. Cash and personal checks made to **Sandy Springs Center for Psychological Services** are acceptable for payment, and I will provide you with a receipt of payment. The receipt of payment may also be used as a statement for insurance if applicable to you. Please note that there is a \$25 fee for any returned checks.

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Insurance companies have many rules and requirements specific to certain plans. It is your responsibility to find out your insurance company's policies and to file for insurance reimbursement. I will be glad to provide you with a statement for your insurance company and to assist you with any questions you may have in this area. **I do not file insurance forms directly.** Please be aware that I am an out-of-network provider for all insurance companies.

If you become involved in legal proceedings that require my professional participation, you will be expected to pay for all of my professional time, including preparation and transportation costs, even if I am called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement, I charge \$500 per hour for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding.

Cancellation Policy

In the event that you are unable to keep an appointment, you must notify me at least 24 hours in advance. If such advance notice is not received, you will be financially responsible for the session you missed. Please note that insurance companies do not reimburse for missed sessions.

In Case of an Emergency

My practice is considered to be an outpatient facility, and I am set up to accommodate individuals who are reasonably safe and resourceful. I do not carry a beeper nor am I available at all times. If at any time this does not feel like sufficient support, please inform me, and we can discuss additional resources or transfer your case to a therapist or clinic with 24-hour availability. Generally, I will return phone calls within 24-48 hours. If you have a mental health emergency, I encourage you not to wait for a return call, but to do one or more of the following:

- Call Behavioral Health Link/GCAL: 800-715-4225
- Call Ridgeview Institute at 770.434.4567
- Call Peachford Hospital at 770.455.3200
- Call 911.
- Go to your nearest emergency room.

Professional Relationship

Psychotherapy is a professional service I will provide to you. Because of the nature of therapy, your relationship with me has to be different from most relationships. It may differ in how long it lasts, the objectives, or the topics discussed. It must also be limited to only the relationship of therapist and client. If you and I were to interact in any other ways, we would then have a "dual relationship," which could prove to be harmful to you in the long run and is, therefore, unethical in the mental health profession. Dual relationships can set up conflicts between the therapist's interests and the client's interests, and then the client's (your) interests might not be put first. In order to offer all of my clients the best care, my judgment needs to be unselfish and purely focused on your needs. This is why your relationship with me must remain professional in nature.

Additionally, there are important differences between therapy and friendship. Friends may see your position only from their personal viewpoints and experiences. Friends may want to find quick and easy solutions to your problems so that they can feel helpful. These short-term solutions may not be in your long-term best interest. Friends do not usually follow up on their advice to see whether it was useful. They may *need* to have you do what they advise. A therapist offers you choices and helps you choose what is best for you. A therapist helps you learn how to solve problems better and make better decisions. A therapist's responses to your situation are based on tested theories and methods of change.

You should also know that therapists are required to keep the identity of their clients confidential. As much as I would like to, for your confidentiality I will not address you in public unless you speak to me first. When your therapy is completed, I will not be able to be a friend to you like your other friends. In sum, it is my duty to always maintain a professional role. Please note that these guidelines are not meant to be discourteous in any way, they are strictly for your long-term protection.

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Statement Regarding Ethics, Client Welfare & Safety

I assure you that my services will be rendered in a professional manner consistent with the ethical standards of the American Psychological Association. If at any time you feel that I am not performing in an ethical or professional manner, I ask that you please let me know immediately. If we are unable to resolve your concern, I will provide you with information to contact the professional licensing board that governs my profession.

Due to the very nature of psychotherapy, as much as I would like to guarantee specific results regarding your therapeutic goals, I am unable to do so. However, with your participation, we will work to achieve the best possible results for you. Please also be aware that changes made in therapy may affect other people in your life. For example, an increase in your assertiveness may not always be welcomed by others. It is my intention to help you manage changes in your interpersonal relationships as they arise, but it is important for you to be aware of this possibility nonetheless.

Additionally, at times people find that they feel somewhat worse when they first start therapy before they begin to feel better. This may occur as you begin discussing certain sensitive areas of your life. However, a topic usually isn't sensitive unless it needs attention. Therefore, discovering the discomfort is actually a success. Once you and I are able to target your specific treatment needs and the particular modalities that work the best for you, help is generally on the way.

Technology Statement

In our ever-changing technological society, there are several ways we could potentially communicate and/or follow each other electronically. It is of utmost importance to me that I maintain your confidentiality, respect your boundaries, and ascertain that your relationship with me remains therapeutic and professional. Therefore, I've developed the following policies:

Cell phones: It is important for you to know that cell phones may not be completely secure and confidential. However, I realize that most people have and utilize a cell phone. I may also use a cell phone to contact you. If this is a problem, please feel free to discuss this with me.

Text Messaging and Email: Both text messaging and emailing are not secure means of communication and may compromise your confidentiality. However, I realize that many people prefer to text and/or email because it is a quick way to convey information. If you choose to utilize texting or email, please discuss this with me. **However, please know that it is my policy to utilize these means of communication strictly for brief topics such as appointment confirmations.** Please do not bring up any therapeutic content via text or email to prevent compromising your confidentiality. **You also need to know that I am required to keep a copy of all emails and texts as part of your clinical record.**

Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, Etc: It is my policy not to accept requests from any current or former client on social networking sites such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram, Pinterest, etc. because it may compromise your confidentiality.

Google, etc.: It is my policy not to search for my clients on Google or any other search engine. I respect your privacy and make it a policy to allow you to share information about yourself with me as you feel appropriate. If there is content on the Internet that you would like to share with me for therapeutic reasons, please print this material out and bring it to your session.

In summary, technology is constantly changing, and there are implications to all of the above that we may not realize at this time. Please feel free to ask questions, and know that I am open to any feelings or thoughts you have about these and other modalities of communication.

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Our Agreement to Enter into a Therapeutic Relationship

I am sincerely looking forward to facilitating you on your journey toward healing and growth. If you have any questions about any part of this document, please ask.

Please print, date, and sign your name below indicating that you have read and understand the contents of this form, you agree to the policies of your relationship with me as your therapist, and you are authorizing me to begin treatment with you.

Client Name (Please Print)

Date

Client Signature

If Applicable:

Parent's or Legal Guardian's Name (Please Print)

Date

Parent's or Legal Guardian's Signature

My signature below indicates that I have discussed this form with you and have answered any questions you have regarding this information.

Paul J. Cohen, Ph.D.
GA Licensed Psychologist No. 2928

Date

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