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Informed Consent for Assessment and Treatment

This document contains important information about my professional services and business policies. Please read this carefully before our next session because it contains information important to your care. The law requires that I obtain your signature acknowledging that I have given you this information before we can continue with therapy.

Background and Services. I am a professional counselor in an independent private practice. My credentials include a Doctorate degree in clinical psychology. I am licensed by the Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners. I offer counseling and psychotherapy to individuals and couples in the areas of mental health, relationships, adjustment, personal development, family transition, and skill development issues.

The primary focus of my practice is working with adults. I treat a wide variety of concerns, including depression, anxiety, mood disorders, relationship problems and grief. Clients that present in counseling with substance dependence, diagnosed eating disorders, sexually abusive or violent behaviors, severe mental disorders, or certain personality disorders as their primary problem will be referred to other professions or programs that specialize in these areas. I reserve the right to refer a client to another therapist or appropriate resource at any time if their needs in therapy are not a good match for my skills or experience.

Purpose, limitations, and risks of treatment. Psychotherapy has been scientifically demonstrated to be of benefit to most people in many different situations. People who are depressed may find their mood lifting. Others may feel less afraid, angry, or anxious. Psychotherapy provides a chance to talk things out fully until feelings are relieved and problems are resolved. Relationship skills improve, and clients are more able to cope with stressful situations. They may receive more satisfaction from social, personal and family relationships. Their personal goals and values may become clearer. They may grow in many directions—as individuals, in their close relationships, in their work or schooling, and in the ability to enjoy their lives.

There are also risks in therapy. By opening up unexamined areas in your life, you may feel worse for a while. People around you can also be affected and may not like the resulting emotions or the changes you decide to make in yourself. Therapy often triggers you to question areas of your life such as career, lifestyle, parenting style, relationships and values. This can all be very uncomfortable. Finally, even with our best efforts, there is a risk that therapy may not be as effective as you would like. Therapy cannot make life less complex. It is designed to give you internal and external tools and resources to deal with life's complexities. As with many things in life, you get out of therapy only what you put in. The people who seem to make the most progress are those who consistently want to know how to change themselves (as opposed to those who want to change others).

Treatment process and rights. Your counseling will begin with one or more sessions devoted to an initial assessment so that I can get a good understanding of the issues, your background, and any other factors that may be relevant. When the initial assessment process is complete, we will discuss ways to treat the problem(s) that have brought you into counseling and develop a treatment plan. You have the right and the obligation to participate in treatment decisions and in the development and periodic review and revision

of your treatment plan. You also have the right to refuse any recommended treatment or to withdraw consent to treat and to be advised of the consequences or such refusal or withdrawal.

Most of my clients see me once a week for two to three months. After that, we may meet less often for several more months. The process of ending therapy is a very valuable part of our work. 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 agree to meet for at least one more session to review our work together. We will review our goals, the work we have done, and any future work that needs to be done. If you would like to take a “time out” from therapy to try it on your own, we should discuss this. We can discuss how to make the “time out” more helpful.

Office setting. My office is attached to my home. The office is accessed thru a separate entrance. There is a waiting room and bathroom for my clients that are both separate from the living area of the home. While you will be coming to my home address, you will be in a setting that is separate, private and dedicated exclusively to my counseling practice.

Privacy, confidentiality, and records. Ordinarily, all communications and records created in the process of counseling are held in the strictest confidence. However, there are numerous exceptions to confidentiality defined in the state and federal statutes. The most common of these exceptions are when there is a real or potential life or death emergency, when the court issues a subpoena, or when child or vulnerable adult abuse or neglect is involved. This counselor will not be used to testify in legal matters related or unrelated to therapy. I also participate in a process where selected cases are discussed with other professional colleagues to facilitate my continued professional growth and to get you the benefit of a variety of professional experts. While no identifying information is released in this peer consultation process, the dynamics of the problems and the people are discussed along with the treatment approaches and methods.

During times when I am out of town or otherwise unavailable, I will typically have another licensed therapist on call for me. I reserve the right to disclose confidential information from your records and our time together, including personally identifiable information, to this on-call therapist to facilitate the coverage of your care in my absence.

There are also numerous other circumstances when information may be released including when disclosure is required by the Arizona Board of Behavioral Health Examiners, when a lawsuit is filed against me, to comply with worker compensation laws, to comply with the USA Patriot Act and to comply with other federal, state or local laws. The rules and laws regarding confidentiality, privacy, and records are complex.

Emails, cell phones, computers and e-faxes: It is very important to be aware that computers and unencrypted email, texts, and e-fax communication can be accessed by unauthorized people and hence can compromise the privacy and confidentiality of such communication. Emails, texts, and e-faxes, in particular, are vulnerable to such unauthorized access due to the fact that servers or communication companies may have unlimited and direct access to all emails, texts and e-faxes that go through them. While data on my laptop is encrypted, emails and e-fax are not. It is always a possibility that e-faxes, texts, and email can be sent erroneously to the wrong address and computers. My laptop is equipped with a firewall, virus protection and a password, and I back up all confidential information from my computer on a regular basis to an encrypted back-up service. Please notify me if you decide to avoid or limit, in any way, the use of email, texts, cell phones calls, phone messages, or e-faxes. If you communicate confidential or private information via unencrypted email, texts or e-fax or via phone messages, I will assume that you have made an informed decision, and I will view it as your agreement to take the risk that such

communication may be intercepted, and I will honor your desire to communicate on such matters. Please do not use texts, email, voice mail, or e-faxes for emergencies.

In the event of my death or incapacity, the records for my clients that are actively receiving services (seen within the last month) will be given to one or more local behavioral health professionals to facilitate the continuation of treatment. In such a situation, you have the right to continue treatment with this professional, discontinue treatment, or ask for a referral. Records for my inactive clients will be handled by a “records custodian,” which may be an individual or company. The custodian will be responsible for satisfying records requests and destroying records when the legal timeframes for records retention are satisfied.

Our relationship. The client/counselor relationship is unique in that it is exclusively therapeutic. In other words, it is inappropriate for a client and a counselor to spend time together socially, to bestow gifts, or to attend family or religious functions. If we encounter each other in the community, I may nod or smile, but I will not acknowledge you as anyone I know. I’m not trying to be rude, but attempting to maintain your confidentiality. Even though you might invite me, I will not attend your family gatherings, such as parties or weddings. As your therapist, I will not celebrate holidays or give you gifts; I may not notice or recall your birthday. I also ask that you refrain from giving gifts to me. The purpose of these boundaries is to ensure that you and I are clear in our roles for your treatment and that your confidentiality is maintained.

If there is ever a time when you believe that you have been treated unfairly or disrespectfully, please talk with me about it. It is never my intention to cause this to happen to my clients, but sometimes misunderstandings can inadvertently result in hurt feelings. I want to address any issues that might get in the way of the therapy as soon as possible. This includes administrative or financial issues as well.

Financial. Payment is expected at the beginning of each session unless other arrangements have been made. By signing this document, you are agreeing to pay for the services rendered and any additional expenses that may be accrued in collecting said fees.

Regular Therapy Services: Currently, the fee for a 50 minute counseling session is \$145.00. Sessions that are extended by more than ten minutes will be charged on a prorated basis. Please note that some insurance companies will not pay for an appointment outside of the traditional 50 minutes.

Telephone consultations: I have a strong preference for face-to-face contact. However, telephone consultations may be necessary at certain times in our therapy. If these last longer than ten minutes, you will be charged at the prorated hourly rate. If I need to have long telephone conferences with other professionals as part of your treatment, you will be billed for these at the same rate. If you are concerned about this, please be sure to let me know in advance so we can set a policy that is comfortable for both of us. Of course, there is no charge for calls about appointments or other business.

Other services: Charges for other services, such as hospital visits, consultations with other therapists, home visits, or court-related services (such as consultations with lawyers, depositions, or attendance at courtroom proceedings) will be based on the time involved in providing the service using my regular fee schedule.

I reserve the right to change my fees with 30 days notice and to use the services of a third-party collections service, when necessary. Refunds are not made after the services have been rendered. You have the right to be informed of all fees that you are required to pay. Please discuss these with me if you have a concern.

Insurance. I am a preferred provider for Blue Cross Blue Shield only. I am out of network for all other plans. If you are using one of these plans to pay for your treatment it will be your responsibility to call your insurance company to find out your mental health benefits. If you are using an insurance program

other than Blue Cross, I will supply you with a superbill that you can turn into your insurance company so they can reimburse you. Your insurance company or managed care company may limit the number of sessions based on their assessment of medical necessity or other factors. Their determination may or may not match what you want or need in treatment. In the event that they will not authorize additional sessions or you exhaust the sessions that your insurance will provide, you understand that you will have to pay for the additional services rendered. In all cases however, payment for services is the responsibility of the client, not the insurance company. Once again, please discuss this with me if you have any questions.

Using a third party to reimburse you for the counseling implies that some information will be released in order to obtain payment for the services.

Availability of services. My practice does not have the capability to respond immediately to counseling emergencies. True emergencies should be directed to the community emergency services (911) or to the local hotlines (Empact – 480-784-1500, Banner Help line - 602-254-4357, ValueOptions – 602-222-9444). Established clients with an urgent need to make contact may contact me via cellular phone, but an immediate response is not guaranteed. A quick or immediate response in one situation does not constitute a commitment of rapid response in another situation. I attempt to return phone calls within the same day if left during office hours or within a 24/48 hour period. Also, I do *not* communicate via texts or fax.

Appointments. Regular attendance at your scheduled appointments is one of the keys to a successful outcome in counseling. I reserve a 45-50 minutes for each appointment with a client. If I am ever unable to start on time, I can usually extend your session beyond the allotted hour. If you are late, we will probably be unable to meet for the full time, because it is likely that I will have another appointment after yours. Appointments canceled at the last minute are very detrimental to my practice. Therefore, I ask that you notify me a minimum of one full business day (24 hours, Monday through Friday) prior to your appointment if you need to cancel. Appointments for Mondays must be canceled by the prior Friday at 5:00 P.M. ***You will be billed the full rate for appointments you fail to cancel in accordance with this policy. In addition, if you arrive more than 15 minutes late to an appointment I can not supply a superbill for you to issue to the insurance company for a full session. However, you will be responsible for the fee of a full session. Please note that these are personal financial obligations that you are responsible for; not the obligations of your insurance company.***

Appointment availability varies with the client load at the time. High demand appointments (off hours, late afternoons, etc.) are likely to be sporadic in their availability.