

Office Policies & Procedures

Welcome to my practice. This document provides information about my professional services and business policies. Before beginning treatment, it is important for you to understand my approach to therapy and agree to some rules about your treatment. Please read this document carefully and let me know if you have any questions or need more information. I will be glad to clarify. When you sign the Acknowledgment and Consent form, it will represent an agreement between us.

Confidentiality

In general, law protects the privacy of all communications between a client and a psychologist. I can only release information about my work with you to others with your written permission. However, there are a few exceptions.

When Disclosure is Required by Law: There are some situations in which I am legally obligated to take action to protect others from harm, even if I have to reveal some information about a client's treatment. If I believe that a child, an elderly person or disabled person has been abused or neglected, I must file a report with the appropriate agency. If you tell me that you have viewed child pornography (whether streaming, downloaded, or in another format), I am mandated to report that.

If I believe that a client is threatening serious bodily harm to another, I am required to take protective actions. These actions may include notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, or seeking hospitalization for the client. If the client threatens to harm himself/herself, I may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.

When Disclosure May Be Required: In many legal proceedings, you have the right to prevent me from providing any information about your treatment. In some proceedings involving child custody and/or those in which your emotional condition is an important issue, the confidentiality of my records may be limited.

Health Insurance and Confidentiality of Records: Your health insurance provider may require disclosure of confidential information in order to process claims. While insurance companies claim to keep this information confidential, I have no control over the information once it leaves my office.

Consultation: I consult regularly with other professionals regarding my clients in order to provide the best possible care. However, client identity remains anonymous, and confidentiality is fully maintained. If I believe it is important to consult with another professional in depth, and I believe identifying information about you may be shared, I will ask you to sign a release of information allowing me to share this information. Without such a release, I will not consult with another professional providing information that might lead another person to be able to identify you.

Email, Voicemail and Fax Communication: Email, voice mail and fax communication can be easily accessed by unauthorized people, compromising privacy and confidentiality. Please notify me if you would like to avoid or limit the use of any or all of these forms of communication.

While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important that we discuss any questions or concerns that you may have at our next meeting, or at any time they arise during our work together.

Benefits and Risks of Psychotherapy

Participation in counseling can result in a number of benefits, including improvement or resolution of the concerns that led you to seek it. Working toward these goals requires effort on your part. In order to change your thoughts, feelings, and/or behaviors, psychotherapy requires your active involvement, honesty and openness. Candid discussion about your feedback and views of the therapy are part of the therapeutic process.

Remembering or talking about unpleasant events, feelings, or thoughts during our work can result in your experiencing considerable discomfort, negative emotions or other difficult reactions. I may question some of your assumptions or perceptions or propose different ways of looking at, thinking about, or addressing situations, which may cause you to feel angry, challenged, disappointed, or otherwise upset.

Psychotherapy may also result in your making decisions to change behaviors, employment, substance use, education, housing, or relationships that were not originally intended. While change can happen quickly, it may also happen more slowly than desired. There are no guarantees of what you will experience.

The Process of Psychotherapy

Initial Appointment: The first appointment is usually a longer appointment of 75 minutes in length. This lengthier amount of time allows us to discuss your concerns and relevant background and review my office procedures.

Initial Assessment: Our initial meeting(s) provide the opportunity for us both to decide if I seem to be well matched to provide the psychological services you are seeking. My initial assessment usually takes from 2 to 4 sessions. When the initial assessment is complete, we will discuss my working understanding of your issues, a proposed treatment plan, the therapeutic goals/objectives and possible outcomes.

Regular Sessions: If we decide to continue with ongoing psychotherapy, I will usually schedule one 45-50 minute session per week at a mutually agreed upon time. In some situations sessions may be longer or more frequent. The success of therapy depends on the consistency and continuity of our meetings. It is important that you attend regularly and are on time for appointments, as consistency and predictability are integral to progress in therapy. Frequent cancellations, missed appointments, late arrivals, or erratic scheduling may limit treatment effectiveness.

My Approach: As a psychologist, I bring certain expertise to our collaboration while you bring self-knowledge, the ability to learn from your life experiences, and a vision of what you want your life to be. I consider your issues and exercise my educated judgment about what treatment will be in your best interest.

During the course of treatment, I am likely to draw on various psychological approaches according to my understanding of the presenting problem(s) and my assessment of what will be most likely to benefit you. These approaches include, but are not limited to behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, cognitive, psychodynamic, systems/family, developmental or psychoeducational interventions. Throughout your therapy we will continue to assess whether your goals are being met or if they require revision.

The Client's Role: Therapy is a collaborative, active process. In order for your therapy to be most successful, you will need to work on things we talk about both during our sessions and at home. It is

your responsibility to make a good faith effort to fulfill the treatment recommendations to which you have agreed.

You are expected to play an active role in your counseling, including collaborating with me to identify treatment goals, completing questionnaires when appropriate, and designing and completing homework assignments. I encourage you to ask me questions and give feedback about any aspect of your counseling. If at any time you have any concerns, questions, or feelings about something I have said, or need clarification regarding your progress, do not hesitate to raise these issues. You are welcome to ask about other possible treatments for your condition and their risks or benefits.

Contacting Me

You may leave me a message on my confidential voicemail at any time. If you need to contact me between sessions for a small administrative matter such as rescheduling an appointment, please email me or call me. If you need to contact me between sessions regarding a clinical matter, leave me a message.

As described in my Social and Electronic Media Policy, I prefer to restrict the use of email to simple administrative matters such as scheduling. Please do not communicate with me via email regarding personal or clinical information, or during emergencies. Texting is not part of my practice.

Due to the nature of my work, I am often not immediately available by telephone. However, I check my voicemail regularly during business hours Mondays - Fridays. I try to respond to emails and voicemail messages within 24 hours with the exception of weekends, holidays and vacations/time out of the office. I do not monitor messages on weekends, holidays or during vacation.

Emergencies: Although you can leave me a message at any time, I am often not available to call you back immediately. If an emergency situation arises, please call 911, Psychiatric Emergency Services at 415-206-8125 (24 hours a day), and/or go to your nearest emergency room

Vacations/Planned Absences: I will give you advance notice of vacations and planned absences and request that you do the same.

Office Space: Although I share common space with other tenants, my practice is independent of others in the building.

Payment and Financial Information

Fees: The fee for standard 45-50 minute sessions is currently \$175. The fee for a 75-minute initial appointment is currently \$290. I review my fees annually. I will provide advance notice of any fee increases.

Other professional services are billed and prorated in 15-minute increments on the basis of my standard session rate. Examples of these include: telephone calls over 15 minutes in length, consultation, attendance at meetings you have authorized, preparation of documents (including letters, reports, treatment summaries), reading reports, site visits and travel time.

Clients who seek reimbursement through insurance should remember that professional services are rendered and charged to the clients and not to the insurance company. You agree that you are ultimately responsible for payment. Phone calls/sessions, consultation and document/report review are not typically reimbursed by insurance.

Charlotte Tilson, Psy.D.

Psychologist

I do not have a sliding scale. However, I offer a number of reduced fee slots during off hours. If you feel that financial considerations are a barrier to your seeking or receiving mental health services, please speak with me about it.

Legal Proceedings: If you become involved in legal proceedings that require my participation, you will be expected to pay for my professional time, even if I am called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement, I charge \$300 per hour for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding.

Appearances at legal proceedings are charged in 4-hour blocks (e.g. 8:00 AM to 12:00 PM). Credit card or cash must make payment of all fees no later than 5:00 PM, 3 business days prior to the scheduled court proceeding. You agree that if payment is not made in advance, I am not required to attend. This agreement shall supersede all other documents.

Payment: I accept payment by cash, check, credit or debit card. The fee for each session is due by the end of each session, unless we establish an alternative arrangement. Payment for phone consultation is due at the next session. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to when they are requested.

Insurance: I am an out of network provider. This means that I do not accept medical insurance or bill insurance companies directly. If you wish to receive insurance reimbursement for your sessions, it will be your responsibility to communicate with your insurance company regarding potential coverage for out of network services, complete insurance forms and obtain reimbursements.

Please be aware that insurance companies require a diagnosis and do not cover all of the issues that may lead a person to seek therapy. I can provide you with a monthly billing statement, which some people choose to use for filing claims with their PPO. It is always your responsibility to pay the full agreed upon fee for services at the time they are rendered, regardless of your insurance arrangements.

Balances: I do not permit clients to carry a balance of more than two sessions. If you do not pay for 2 or more sessions, I have the right to immediately stop treatment. Let me know if problems arise during the course of therapy regarding your ability to make timely payments. I reserve the right and you are hereby notified that I may use an external vendor such as a collection agency to collect unpaid balances.

Returned Checks/Denied Credit Card Charges: A \$25.00 fee will be charged for all returned checks. Clients are responsible for promptly making payment for any returned check or denied credit card fee.

Cancellations, Missed Sessions and Tardiness: Please let me know as soon as possible if you are running late. Sessions still end at the regular time, as I need to be prepared and on time for my next appointments. Please inform me as early as possible of a need to cancel or reschedule. With enough advance notice, we can often reschedule for another time the same week.

In order to maximize treatment effectiveness, it is expected that you attend therapy on a weekly basis (unless we agree to a different frequency of meetings). I set aside and hold your weekly time. I also limit the number of clients I see so that I may better address your needs. Given challenges with filling your session time on short notice, I enforce a 24-hour cancellation policy. I will charge for appointments cancelled with less than 24 hours notice, unless we are able to reschedule for a later time that same week. Please note that insurance will not reimburse for missed appointments.

Records and Your Right to Review Them

Both the law and the standards of my profession require that I keep appropriate treatment records for at least 7 years after therapy with an adult has ended. Unless otherwise agreed to, I retain clinical records only as long as is mandated by California law. If you have concerns regarding the treatment records please discuss them with me.

You are entitled to inspect a copy of your records, unless I believe that seeing them would be harmful, in which case I will be happy to send them to a mental health professional of your choice, or I can prepare a summary for you instead.

Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. If you wish to see your records, I recommend that you review them in my presence so that we can discuss the contents. Clients may be charged an appropriate fee for any professional time spent in responding to information requests.

Complaints

If you have a concern or complaint about your treatment, please speak with me about it. As a licensed psychologist, I have the following notice posted in my office, but would also like to make it available here for your reference.

NOTICE TO CONSUMERS: The Department of Consumer Affairs' Board of Psychology receives and responds to questions and complaints regarding the practice of psychology. If you have any questions or complaints, you may contact the Board on the Internet at www.psychboard.ca.gov, by emailing bop@dca.ca.gov, calling (916) 574-7720, or by writing to the following address:

Board of Psychology
1625 North Market Street, Ste N-215
Sacramento, CA 95834

Ending Therapy

You may end your therapy or take a break from it at any time. Ideally, therapy involves a well-planned end point that we both agree upon. In this type of situation, your therapy ends when you have reached your treatment goals, and we agree that you are likely to maintain these gains. However, there are a variety of reasons therapy comes to an end, and not every therapy ends in this way.

I like to offer my clients my full support in leaving therapy. When you are ready to end therapy, I would like to help you leave therapy well. In order to do this, all you need to do is give me advance notice. Several weeks' notice is adequate, although further notice is appreciated or may be beneficial in some cases.

Noncompliance with treatment recommendations may necessitate early termination of services. Failure or refusal to pay for services after a reasonable time is another condition for termination of services. Please let me know any time your financial situation changes.