

Psychologist-Client Agreement

This section contains important information about my professional services and business policies. It also contains summary information about the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act ([HIPAA](#)), a federal law that provides new privacy protections and new patient rights with regard to the use and disclosure of your Protected Health Information (PHI) used for the purpose of treatment, payment, and health care operations. HIPAA requires that I provide you with a Notice of Privacy Practices for use and disclosure of PHI for treatment, payment, and health care operations. The Notice, which follows these Office Policies and is included as part of the services agreement, explains HIPAA and its application to your personal health information in greater detail. The law requires that I obtain your signature acknowledging that I have provided you with this information at the end of our first session.

Although these documents are long and sometimes complex, it is very important that you read them carefully. We can discuss any questions you have about the procedures. When you sign the signature page of the intake form, your signature will represent an agreement between us. You may revoke this agreement in writing at any time. That revocation will be binding on me unless I have taken action in reliance on it, if there are obligations imposed on me by your health insurer in order to process or substantiate claims made under your policy, or if you have not satisfied any financial obligations you have incurred.

Confidentiality

The law protects the privacy of all communications between a client and a psychologist. In most situations, I can only release information about your treatment to others if you sign a written authorization form that meets certain legal requirements imposed by HIPAA. **There are other situations that require only that you provide written, advance consent. Your signature on this agreement provides consent for those activities, as follows:**

- I may occasionally find it helpful to consult other health and mental health professionals about a case. During a consultation, I make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of my patient. The other professionals are also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you do not object, I will not tell you about these consultations unless I feel that it is important to our work together. I will note all consultations in your clinical record (which is called "PHI" in my Notice of Psychologist's Policies and Practices to Protect the Privacy of Your Health Information).
- You should be aware that I employ administrative staff. In most cases, I need to share protected information with these individuals for both clinical and administrative purposes, such as scheduling, billing and quality assurance. All of the mental health professionals are bound by the same rules of confidentiality. All staff members and contractors have been given training about protecting your privacy and have agreed not to release any information outside of the practice without my written permission.
- I have contracts with accountants, an answering service, computer technicians and consultants, and a transcriptionist. As required by HIPAA, I have a formal business associate contract with these businesses, in which they promise to maintain the confidentiality of this data except as specifically allowed in the contract or otherwise required by law. If you wish, I can provide you with a blank copy of this contract.
- Disclosures required by health insurers or to collect overdue fees are discussed elsewhere in this agreement.
- If a 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.

There are some situations where I am permitted or required to disclose information without either your consent or authorization:

- If you are involved in a court proceeding and a request is made for information concerning my professional services, such information is protected by the psychologist-patient privilege law. I cannot provide any information without your written authorization, or a court order. If you are involved in or contemplating litigation, you should consult with your attorney to determine whether a court would be likely to order me to disclose information.
- If a government agency is requesting the information for health oversight activities, I may be required to provide it for them.
- If a client files a complaint or lawsuit against me, I may disclose relevant information regarding that client in order to defend myself.
- If a client files a worker's compensation claim, and I am providing treatment related to the claim, I must, upon appropriate request, furnish copies of all medical reports and bills.
- There are some situations in which I am legally obligated to take actions which I believe are necessary to attempt to protect others from harm and I may have to reveal some information about a client's treatment. These situations are unusual in my practice.
- If I have reason to believe that a child has been abused, the law requires that I file a report with the appropriate governmental agency, usually the Department of Family and Children's Services or the Department of Human Resources. Once such a report is filed, I may be required to provide additional information.
- If I have reasonable cause to believe that a disabled adult or elder person has had a physical injury or injuries inflicted upon such disabled adult or elder person, other than by accidental means, or has been neglected or exploited, I must report to an agency designated by the Department of Human Resources. Once such a report is filed, I may be required to provide additional information.
- If I determine that a client presents a serious danger of violence to another, I may be required to take protective actions. These actions may include notifying the potential victim, and/or contacting the police, and/or seeking hospitalization for the client.

If such a situation arises, I will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action and I will limit my disclosure to what is necessary. 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 now or in the future. The laws governing confidentiality can be quite complex and I am not an attorney. In situations where specific advice is required, formal legal advice may be needed.

Client Records

The laws and standards of my profession require that I keep Protected Health Information (PHI) about you in your clinical record. Except in unusual circumstances that involve danger to yourself and others or makes reference to another person (unless such other person is a health care provider) and I believe that access is reasonably likely to cause substantial harm to such other person or where information has been supplied to me confidentially by others, you may examine and/or receive a copy of your clinical record, if you request it in writing. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. For this reason, I recommend that you initially review them in my presence, or have them forwarded to another mental health professional so you can discuss the contents. In most situations, I am allowed to charge a copying fee of \$.50 cents per page (and for certain other expenses like postage). If I refuse your request for access to

your records, you have a right of review (except for information provided to me confidentially by others) which I will discuss with you upon request.

Client Rights and HIPAA

[HIPAA](#) provides you with several new or expanded rights with regard to your Clinical Record and disclosures of Protected Health Information. These rights include requesting that I amend your record; requesting restrictions on what information from your clinical record is disclosed to others; requesting an accounting of most disclosures of Protected Health Information that you have neither consented to nor authorized; determining the location to which protected information disclosures are sent; having any complaints you make about my policies and procedures recorded in your records; and the right to a paper copy of this agreement, the accompanying Georgia HIPAA Notice form, and my privacy policies and procedures. I am happy to discuss any of these rights with you.

Minors and Parents

Patients under 18 years of age 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 or we agree otherwise. 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/her attendance at scheduled sessions. I will also provide parents with a summary of their child's treatment when it is complete. Any other communication will require the child's authorization, unless I feel that the child is in danger or is a danger to someone else, in which case I will notify the parents of my concern. Before giving parents any information, I will discuss the matter with the child, if possible, and do my best to handle any objections he/she may have.

Emergencies and After-Hour Calls

I schedule appointments and am in my office from 8:15 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., on an alternating workweek schedule. This schedule is Monday through Thursday one week and Tuesday through Friday on the other. My office manager typically is in the office from approximately 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. on the days I am in the office. During these hours, the phone will usually be answered by my office manager. If the office manager does not answer, you will be able to leave a message on the voice mail system if all lines are busy or if the office manager has temporarily left the office. You can expect your call to be returned, normally within one hour, if you leave a message under these circumstances.

If you call when the office is closed or on the weekend, your call will be returned the day the office reopens if it is a routine matter like scheduling or re-scheduling an appointment or asking questions about your bill or insurance payments. IF YOU HAVE AN EMERGENCY, you will hear recorded instructions about how to contact me, or the on-call therapist if I am out of town or on vacation. Follow these instructions and you should hear from me or the on-call therapist within a few minutes. If for any reason you do not get a return call, there may have been a problem with either how you followed the instructions or with my communication system. If after trying a second time there is no return call, contact the emergency room of the hospital covered by your insurance company or call 911.