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STARTING PSYCHOTHERAPY

MY POLICIES AND PRACTICES

GETTING STARTED.

If this is the first time you've worked with a mental health professional, you may wonder how therapy works. On the other hand, if you've worked with therapists in the past, you know this will be similar to or different from your work with other therapists. I've put this information together to help you be as informed as possible about what's going on. **If you ever have questions, please ask me.**

MY TRAINING AND EXPERIENCE.

I am a Licensed Professional Counselor, licensed by the State of Georgia to practice psychotherapy. I've been licensed since 1987. I have a Master of Science degree in clinical psychology from Purdue University. I'm a member of the American Counseling Association.

HOW I DO THERAPY.

I consider my areas of expertise to be **intimacy, relationships, sexuality, spirituality, depression and anxiety**. I typically do not work with people whose primary problem is likely to require psychiatric hospitalization, or who are actively suicidal. Our work together will be shaped by your goals. If you have questions or concerns about anything that happens in therapy, I please ask me and I will do my best to give you clear answers. I do not routinely give a psychiatric diagnosis for my clients because I think that way of looking at life problems isn't helpful for most people. **If you request a statement for insurance reimbursement, however, your insurance carrier will likely require a diagnosis.**

EMERGENCIES.

I will try to be available to you outside of normal business hours if you need me; I do my best to get back to you within 24 hours, usually much sooner. **If you have a life-threatening emergency, please contact your physician or dial 911.**

PRIVACY POLICY AND NOTICE OF INFORMATION PRACTICES.

Protecting your privacy is very important to me. With that in mind, I want you to know how I handle information about you:

- It is my policy to collect no more information than necessary from my clients. I do not routinely collect information such as Social Security numbers unless there is a reason to do so.
- I do not maintain a mailing list, nor do I solicit business by mail. I may write you a letter during or after the time you are my client if I am offering a program or workshop I think might interest you. I do not sell my client list or client information to any third party under any circumstances.
- If it is uncomfortable for you to receive a phone call from me at your place of work, please don't share your work phone number with me. If it is all right to call, please let me know if it is all right to leave a brief message (e.g., "This is John Ballew calling for Bill. Please call me at...") Please let me know if there are any special considerations that need to be observed regarding calling and leaving a message at home, with a cell phone or via email.

- Communicating by email is fast and convenient. However, downloading email from a private account while using your work computer may leave recoverable information on storage disks even if you delete the email itself. To safeguard your privacy, you may want to avoid discussing intimate information via email and restrict your correspondence to scheduling appointments, etc.
- Many people communicate by text these days. You should know that texting is not completely secure or private, so you may want to avoid this way of communicating.
- Social media and networking: Sometimes clients come across my page on Facebook, LinkedIn or similar sites and want to add me as a friend or contact. Because I can't guarantee how such sites or apps protect your privacy, I decline to connect with clients this way. If you have questions, please ask me.

As a Licensed Professional Counselor practicing in compliance with federal laws and laws of the State of Georgia, my professional notes and records are considered confidential and privileged. Things you should know about how I protect your privacy include:

- I keep minimal notes on your sessions. The only purpose of these notes is to be able to be as useful to you as possible. I do not keep formal "case record" notes, write reports or diagnose my clients according to the DSM-V unless you have requested that I do so.
- Under normal circumstances, nothing you disclose within the context of counseling sessions is disclosed without your written authorization.
- If it would be helpful to you for me to release information to another professional (for instance, to your physician), my practice is to release only the minimum information necessary, and only with your written authorization to do so. If you would like a copy of any such information, I will provide you with one. If we are doing couples therapy, your partner would also need to sign a release.
- Under some circumstances, I may discuss your case with another professional to obtain his or her opinion on how best to serve you; however, identifying information about you is not disclosed.
- As a matter of good business practice, if you are referred to me by your physician or another professional I would like to send them a note thanking them, but not disclosing anything we discuss. If you would prefer that I not do so, just let me know.

There are limits to the confidentiality of our work together, and I want you to know about them:

- In the event that your behavior or emotional state could cause immediate harm to yourself or another person all mental health professionals have a duty to take appropriate action, including informing a third party. This is to protect the safety of you and/or the other person.

If you have any questions regarding my policies, please ask me. If you ever feel your privacy has been violated, you have the right to complain.

ETHICS.

I subscribe to the ethical standards of the American Counseling Association; these standards are available online at www.counseling.org. These standards are designed to protect you, promote your wellbeing and respect your dignity.

I take ethics very seriously. If you ever have a question or concern, please let me know. Should you ever feel a psychotherapist has treated you in an unethical manner, you have the right to complain to his or her professional association and to state authorities.

APPOINTMENTS AND FEES.

Unless we make other arrangements, appointments are for 45-50 minutes. You'll get the most from your session if you arrive on time. If you arrive early, please knock once and have a seat on the porch and I'll get with you as soon as I'm free. **Please give me at least 24 hours notice if you need to change or cancel your appointment – otherwise, you will be charged for the session.**

Payment for services is expected at the completion of each session unless we've made another arrangement. Payment may be made by cash, check or credit card. I do not bill insurance, although I am happy to furnish you with a statement on a monthly or quarterly basis for you to file for reimbursement yourself. If you have special needs, please ask me and I will do my best to accommodate you.

While some clients complete therapy relatively quickly, others may continue working with me for longer periods of time. Under those circumstances, it is possible that I may increase my fee at some point. Please know that I will work with you if the cost of therapy ever becomes too burdensome.

To cover administrative and banking costs, the fee for returned (bounced) checks is \$40 per occurrence.

ENDING OUR WORK TOGETHER

How we end things is just as important as how we begin. In most cases, my clients and I decide together when our work is complete. If you decide on your own to end therapy, please let me know so I won't keep trying to contact you. If I don't hear from you in six weeks, I will close your case record.

REFERRALS

If you have a friend who would find counseling helpful, please know that I welcome referrals, which signify feelings of satisfaction and trust in my services. Of course, I keep all information about you and anyone you might refer to me strictly confidential and would not reveal anything we have talked about – or even that we have talked. As with anything else about our work together, if you have questions, please ask me.