

Informed Consent for Treatment & Notification of Client Rights

Welcome to North Star Counseling of Jackson! Please read all the information in this form carefully as it will help you understand who I am and what to expect from the services I provide.

While therapy is primarily a clinical service, therapy also involves a professional arrangement, regulated by laws, ethics, your rights as a client, and my standard business practices. Before therapy can begin, your understanding and agreement to the business practices described in this form are necessary. Your initials at the end of each section indicate your understanding and agreement of that section.

Who I Am:

- I am a therapist with over 25 years of experience. I earned a master's degree in social work from the University of Michigan in 1994, and have a current license, in good standing, in the State of Michigan. I also earned the ACSW credential from the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) in 2002 and am a current member in good standing with the NASW as well as with the International Trauma Training Institute.
- I have extensive training and experience in treating many different mental health conditions. I work hard to stay up-to-date on current research and new information in the field. You can expect that I will have the training and experience to help you or will refer you to another resource if I do not.
- I believe in fully partnering with my clients to determine how best to help them. I use a variety of therapeutic models that guide my work, but I believe that each person is unique and work from a person-centered approach. This puts each client at the center, as the captain, of their treatment. My belief is that no one is more of an expert on you than yourself. I also believe that change is possible for anyone, in any circumstance, given the right skills and resources.

What I Do/What to Expect:

- I generally provide therapy services at the office, face-to-face, during business hours only. I will help you plan to manage your symptoms between sessions and will develop a crisis/safety plan with you if needed. However, sometimes a problem may develop between sessions that you have trouble managing on your own (such as suddenly feeling suicidal). Should this happen, I want you to call me right away. If a phone consultation is needed, I reserve the right to charge for the time we spend together at my normal rate. However, I can typically schedule a session with you within a day or two of your call if needed. If you believe you will need frequent contact between sessions, we should discuss this at the first session.
- I provide treatment for many different issues, but I do not prescribe medication, provide psychological testing, provide primary substance abuse treatment, or treat every mental health condition. If I cannot help you, I will give you information about other services that may be able to help you.
- When you first come in, I will complete an assessment. This will typically take 1-3 sessions to complete. You will be asked a lot of questions about yourself. This helps me get to know you, why you are seeking my services, and to decide together if I can help you. At the end of this process, you will either make a treatment plan (an agreement about what you will work on in therapy) if we decide to work together or be referred for other services that better fit your needs. If you decide to pursue other treatment options or are referred elsewhere, I will be happy to provide a copy of my assessment with a written authorization.

- Sessions are typically scheduled once per week but can be more or less frequent, depending on your needs. Sometimes scheduling more frequently can speed your progress or help you through a particularly challenging time. Sessions last typically between 45-60 minutes but can be shorter or longer, depending on your needs. Sessions that start later than the designated appointment time due to late arrival will not typically be extended past the original ending time for the appointment.
- I often provide therapy homework assignments designed to help your progress. If you do not want to complete these or believe you will be unable to complete these, please inform me during the first session.
- The duration of therapy varies greatly from person to person. Some people with mild problems come for just a few sessions. Others, with more severe or long-lasting difficulties, may require many months of hard, persistent work before feeling better.
- Because providing ethical care and maintaining a therapeutic working relationship is of utmost importance to me:
 - I do not meet with clients and/or friends or family members of clients outside of sessions;
 - I do not become involved in any business dealings with clients;
 - I do not accept gifts that are of any value from clients and/or family members of clients.
- There may be times when you ask me to complete paperwork for an outside source. If I agree to do this, there may be a cost for my time and effort as outlined in the financial agreement. You will be entirely responsible for this cost as insurances do not cover this fee. This fee as well as any outstanding balance on your account must be paid in full before the requested paperwork will be submitted.
- The purpose of my services are therapeutic. I do not provide assessments for custody or other legal matters. In keeping with this, because it could disrupt your therapy, I will not appear in court for any matter unless an order from a judge is received (a subpoena is not sufficient). If I am required to testify in any court proceedings, a fee for my time and preparation will be applied to your account as outlined in the financial agreement. You will be entirely responsible for this cost as insurances do not cover this fee.

Use of Technology:

- I only use texting for scheduling issues, if you have provided consent for texting on your registration form, unless it is an emergent situation and there is no other form of communication possible. If you choose to communicate with me in this format, you acknowledge that this is not a secure form of communication and accept the associated risks at the time you initiate or request contact.
- I use email generally for administrative purposes only, such as canceling/scheduling appointments or sending forms. The email server I use is compliant with HIPAA regulations. However, to use this service, you are required to sign into a link, with a username and password, whenever sending or receiving email. Some people prefer not to use the secure server as a matter of convenience. You can opt out of using the secure server with the understanding that there are no guarantees about privacy if you choose this option.
- I offer telehealth sessions as requested and if they are appropriate to your needs. If you would like to use telehealth services, you will need to provide a separate informed consent by signature for this service.
- I will not friend/follow you on any social media platform (i.e. facebook, twitter, pintrest) or post anything about you or our interactions online as doing so would violate your privacy.

- I recommend that you not store my phone number on your smartphone if you allow social media applications to access your contact list. Storing my phone number and allowing social media applications to access your contact list could lead to inadvertent privacy violations (social applications suggesting you “friend” someone who also has my contact information stored, for instance).
- Generally, I do not conduct online searches for my clients. However, occasionally I may search for you online for a specific purpose. Examples of times when I may do this include: if I am concerned about self-harm or harm to others, for a compelling professional reason, or at your request with authorization.
- Occasionally I may request your consent to record your session via audio or video technology. If I make this request, a separate informed consent must be given by signature before using this technology.
- I use an electronic health record that is a secure system, compliant with HIPAA regulations, and submit billing electronically via this system. I am the administrator for this system and use several measures to protect your information. However, as with all technology and even with protective measures, there is a risk that stored data could be accessed by unauthorized people or companies, or that our electronic communications may be compromised, unsecured, or accessed by others.
- I use several measures to protect your electronic information and prevent hacking. I password-protect all technology and programs that I use in my business activities that may be associated with your personal information. I regularly change my passwords, use only encrypted wifi connections, and use other means available (e.g. firewalls, antivirus programs) to protect from hacking and unauthorized access. If your information is compromised, I will notify you in a timely manner as well as inform you of the plan to correct it.

Important Information About Therapy:

- There are many potential benefits from therapy. Therapy can help you improve mental health symptoms, improve and enhance relationships, foster personal growth and resilience, help improve daily functioning, improve the quality of your daily life, and promote overall well-being.
- However, there are also some risks associated with therapy. Sometimes symptoms do get worse for a short time. Therapy can bring up upsetting feelings, thoughts, or memories, and you may feel emotional pain. There may also be times when there are disruptions in your daily life or changes in your relationships. If any of these happen, it is very important to tell me so that we can decide together how to proceed.
- It is also important to understand that therapy does not help everyone, and I cannot guarantee it will help you. However, coming to all your appointments, telling me as much about yourself as you can, following my recommendations, and letting me know if you have any problems, concerns, or complaints will increase the chances that therapy will help you.
- If you do not think therapy is helping you, please tell me as soon as possible.
- If you experience a mental health crisis or emergency (such as new/worsening thoughts of self-harm or harm toward others), it is important to call me right away. If I am not immediately available, I will make every effort to contact you as quickly as I can. However, there may be times when I cannot be reached. If I cannot be reached and you cannot wait for me to contact you, it is important to do one of these things immediately:
 - Call 911
 - Go to the nearest Emergency Room

- Call or go to the nearest Lifeways Community Mental Health Center (1200 N. West Ave, Jackson, 517-789-1200; 25 Care Dr., Hillsdale, 517-439-2641)
- Call or go to Henry Ford Allegiance Access Center (Anderson Building at Henry Ford Allegiance Hospital, 517-205-5971)
- There are times when I may be sick, take vacations, or have other time off. During these times, I typically plan for a colleague to be available for any crisis or emergency that may arise. Contact information for these colleagues is given directly to you when possible as well as via my voicemail and email. It is important to understand that if you choose to contact these colleagues, they will share any information you provided to them with me when I return to the office.
- My services are voluntary. This means that no one is making you come and you can stop services at any time. If you want to stop coming, letting me know ahead of time will allow me to plan with you for anything you may still need.
- There are times when I may discontinue services and close your file before you decide it is time to do so. Some reasons for doing this might include:
 - Not coming for sessions and not calling to cancel (If this happens twice in a row your file will automatically be closed);
 - Cancelling frequently;
 - Having long periods of time when you do not come in (If I do not hear from you within 30 days, I will assume you no longer want therapy services and will close your file);
 - Refusing recommendations when I believe they are essential in helping you;
 - Refusing to follow a plan you agreed to;
 - Coming to sessions drunk or high;
 - Behaving in a threatening or violent way;
 - Bringing weapons to session;
 - Refusing to pay your bill, make arrangements to do so, or follow through with a payment plan;
 - Or your needs are not appropriate to my services.

Client Rights:

As a client of North Star Counseling of Jackson, it is important to understand your rights. I maintain the following rights as a basic cornerstone of our work together.

- *Basic Rights:* You have the right to be treated with dignity and respect. All of your basic human and civil rights remain in effect while you are in treatment.
- *Participation in Treatment:* You have a right to consent to or refuse treatment except as outlined by law. You have a right to ask questions and to be informed of the nature and purpose of any services offered/provided to you. You have a right to participate in developing your treatment goals and to help in determining the course of treatment, including your discharge plan and any aftercare needs. You also have a right to refuse the participation of others in your treatment and to be informed of the possible consequences of this decision.
- *Privacy and Confidentiality:* You have the right for your information to be kept private and confidential except as authorized and required by law. Only information that is helpful in providing services to you will be requested. Except as outlined in the HIPAA Privacy Notice, you will need to sign an authorization to release information to share any information about yourself, unless any of the following occur (as required by Michigan law):
 - As your therapist, I believe you will harm yourself or someone else;

- As your therapist, I believe a child or older adult is being harmed, including past instances of child physical/sexual abuse;
- A subpoena from a judge is received.

Under these circumstances, I am required to make a report and/or take action as required by law.

This includes releasing information about you, including your name. In these circumstances, I will release the minimum amount of information needed as required by law.

- *Quality of Care:* You have a right to expect that, as your therapist, I am competent, qualified, and experienced in the treatment provided and that your services are in the least restrictive environment possible. You have a right to ask about my training and experience. I may refer you elsewhere if treatment is not helping you, if you refuse to follow my recommendations that are deemed important in your care, if your needs outweigh my expertise and/or for any of the reasons noted above.
 - *Access to Records:* You have a right to request to see your record or to have a copy of your record. Only in very rare circumstances in which it is deemed harmful to you will this request be denied or partially denied. There may be a fee associated with copying your record.
 - *Research/Publicity:* You have a right to not be included in any research or experiment. Information about you will not be included in any research, experiment, or public relations without your written consent.
 - *Grievances:* You have a right to voice concerns or file a complaint without any punitive or retaliatory action being taken against you. You can file a complaint directly with me or with appropriate other sources (such as your third party payor or regulating agencies), and it will not be held against you. You also have the right to request a different therapist but this will mean being referred outside the practice.
 - *Client Information:* You are responsible for providing clear and accurate information as requested. If there are any changes in information, such as address, phone number, or insurance information, you are expected to provide this information as soon as possible.
 - *Behavior:* You are expected to be considerate of the rights of others, including me, other therapists who share my office, and other clients. Bringing any weapons to session, behaving in a threatening or aggressive manner, and/or being under the influence of alcohol or drugs is not permitted and will result in the termination of services, possibly also being reported to local police if warranted.
 - *Service Costs:* You have a right to have costs of services explained to you. These costs are explained at the time of the initial appointment and whenever fees are changed or updated. You are responsible for all fees as outlined in the financial agreement.
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