



Copeland Ave. COUNSELING

Helping Build A Better You. ®

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OUTPATIENT SERVICES AGREEMENT FOR COLLATERALS

WHO IS A COLLATERAL?

A collateral is usually a spouse, family member, or friend, who participates in therapy to assist the identified patient. The collateral is not considered to be a client and is not the subject of the treatment. Social Workers have certain legal and ethical responsibilities to client, and the privacy of the relationship is given legal protection.

THE ROLE OF COLLATERALS IN THERAPY

The role of a collateral will vary greatly. For example, a collateral might attend only one session, either alone or with the client, to provide information to the therapist and never attend another session. In another case, a collateral might attend all of the client's therapy sessions and his/her relationship with the client may be a focus of the treatment. We will discuss your specific role in the treatment at our first meeting and other appropriate times.

BENEFITS AND RISKS

Psychotherapy often engages intense emotional experiences, and your participation may prompt strong anxiety or emotional distress. It may also expose or create tension in your relationship with the client. While your participation can result in a better understanding of the client or an improved relationship, or may even help in your own growth and development, there is no guarantee that this will be the case. Psychotherapy is a positive experience for many, but it is not helpful to all people.

MEDICAL RECORDS

No record or chart will be maintained on you in your role as a collateral. Notes about you may be entered into the identified client's chart. The client has a right to access the chart and the material contained therein. It is sometimes possible to maintain the privacy of our communications. If that is your wish, we should discuss it before any information is communicated. You have no right to access that chart without the written consent of the identified client. You will not carry a diagnosis, and there is no individualized treatment plan for you.

FEES

As a collateral, you are not responsible for paying for my professional services unless you are financially responsible for the client; it will be the responsibility of the client. In certain cases, there may be an exception to this rule; for example, if you are the parent of the child coming in to discuss your role to that child, then we would expect you to pay for your visit. Since each case is different, we will discuss your financial responsibility before the first meeting.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The confidentiality of information in the client's chart, including the information that you provide me, is protected by both federal and state law. It can only be released if the identified client specifically authorizes us to do so. There are some exceptions to this general rule:

- If we suspect you are abusing or neglecting a child or a vulnerable adult, we are required to file a report with the appropriate agency.
- If we believe that you are a danger to yourself (suicidal), we must take actions to protect your life even if we must reveal your identity to do so.
- If you threaten serious bodily harm to another, we must take necessary actions to protect that person even if we must reveal your identity to do so.
- If you, or the client, is involved in a lawsuit, and a court requires that we submit information or testify, we must comply.
- If insurance is used to pay for the treatment, the client's insurance company may require us to submit information about the treatment for claims processing purposes or for utilization review.

You are expected to maintain the confidentiality of the identified client (your spouse, friend, or child) in your role as a collateral.

DO COLLATERALS EVER BECOME A FORMAL CLIENT?

Often times collaterals may discuss their own problems in therapy, especially problems that interact with issues of the identified client. Thus, the therapist may recommend formal therapy for a collateral. The following are some examples of when this might occur:

- It becomes evident that a collateral is in need of mental health services. In this circumstance, the collateral needs to have a therapist, diagnosis, and chart records kept.
- Parents, being seen as collaterals as their child is being treated, need couples therapy to improve their relationship so they can function effectively as parents.

Most often, but not always, we will refer you to another therapist for treatment in these situations. There are two reasons the referral may be necessary:

- Seeing two members of the same family, or close friends, may result in a dual role, and potentially cloud the therapist's judgment. Making a referral helps prevent this from happening.
- The therapist must keep a focus on the original primary task of treatment for the identified client. For example, if the therapist started treating a child's behavioral problem, then takes on couple's therapy with mom and dad to address their relationship problems, the original focus of therapy with the child may be lost. A referral helps the therapist to stay focused.

One exception to these guidelines is when a family therapy approach can be effectively and ethically used to treat all members of the family, or each of the couple.

RELEASE OF INFORMATION

The identified client is not required to sign an authorization to release information (Authorization Form) to the collateral when a collateral participates in therapy. The presence of the collateral with the consent of the client is adequate. This provides some assurance that full consent has been given to the therapist for the client's confidential information to be discussed with the collateral in therapy.

The Authorization Form is helpful, though, on those occasions when receiving a telephone call from a collateral or when the therapist calls a collateral for one reason or another. In most instances the therapist cannot take a call from a collateral without an Authorization Form. We will discuss, in our first meeting, whether and Authorization Form will be useful or not for your case.

PARENTS AS COLLATERALS

Clinicians specializing in the treatment of children have long recognized the need to treat children in the context of their family. Participation of parents, siblings, and sometimes extended family members, is common and often recommended. Parents in particular have more rights and responsibilities in their role as a collateral than in other treatment situations where the identified patient is not a minor:

- In treatment involving children and their parents, access to information is an important and sometimes contentious topic. Particularly for older children, trust and privacy are crucial to treatment success. But parents also need to know certain information about the treatment. For this reason, we need to discuss and agree about what information will be shared and what information will remain private. We generally require a written contract signed by both you and your child/children concerning access to a child's record and once that contract is made, we will treat it as legally binding, although it sometimes may be overridden by a judge. In general, we believe that parents should be informed about the goals of treatment, how the treatment is going, and whether the child comes to his/her appointments. We will always inform you if we think that your child is in danger or if he/she is endangering others. One of our first tasks is to discuss and agree on our shared definition of dangerousness so we are all clear about what will be disclosed.
- If you are participating in therapy with your child, you should expect the therapist to request that you examine your own attitudes and behaviors to determine if you can make positive changes that will be of benefit to your child.

SUMMARY

If you have any questions about therapy, our procedures, or your role in this process, please be sure to discuss them with the therapist. Remember that the best way to assure quality and ethical treatment is to keep communication open and direct with your therapist.

