

Professional Psychological Associates
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Welcome to Professional Psychological Associates (PPA)

This document contains important information about our professional services and business policies.

It also contains summary information about the Health Insurance Portability and Privacy Act (HIPAA).

HIPAA requires that we provide you with a Notice of Privacy Practices for use and disclosure of Personal Health Information (PHI) for treatment, payment, and health care operations. The law requires PPA to obtain your signature acknowledging that we have provided you with this information. Although these documents are long and sometimes complex, it is very important that you read them carefully before our sessions. We can discuss any questions you have about the procedures at any time. When you sign the document, it will also represent an agreement between us. You may revoke the agreement in writing at any time. That revocation will be binding on PPA unless we have taken action in order to process claims made under your health insurance policy; or if you have not satisfied any financial obligations you have incurred.

Counseling Services

Counseling is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the therapist and client, and the particular concerns you are experiencing. There are many different methods a therapist may use to deal with the concerns that a client wants to address. Counseling is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, it calls for a very active effort on your part.

In order for therapy to be most successful, you will have to work outside of the therapy session on your identified concerns.

Counseling can have risks and benefits. Since therapy involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, and helplessness. On the other hand, counseling has been shown to have many benefits. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific concerns, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. But there are no guarantees of what you will experience.

Our first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, the therapist will be able to offer first impressions of what your therapy work will include and a treatment plan to follow. You should evaluate this information along with your own belief of whether you feel comfortable in the therapy process. Therapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should be very careful about the therapist you select. If you have questions about any procedure, please discuss them with your therapist whenever they arise.

An evaluation could last from 2 to 4 sessions. During this time, the therapist and client both decide if there is a healthy therapeutic relationship so as to provide the therapy a client needs to meet the treatment goals. When therapy begins you will be scheduled for 3 sessions in 3 consecutive weeks (preferred, not always possible).

Once a therapy session is scheduled, it will be your responsibility to attend as scheduled or to provide 24 hours advance notification of cancellation.

It is important to note that insurance companies do not provide reimbursement for cancelled sessions. PPA has a graduated fee for a failure to cancel an appointment 24 hours in advance (First failure = \$50; second = \$75; third = full fee \$182).

Please kindly help PPA with this issue as there are many people on the waiting list.

If you have doubts regarding your therapy, your therapist will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.

If you are treated by another professional, your therapist will coordinate their services with them.

If for some reason treatment is not going well, a therapist may suggest for you to see another therapist or another professional in addition.

A therapist has an ethical obligation to discontinue therapy if the therapy is not working for a client.

Professional Fees

Payment for services is important in any professional relationship.
The client is responsible for seeing that the therapists services are paid for in full.

Fees are as follows:

Regular therapy services:

Initial Evaluation	\$200	CPT Code 90791	Diagnostic intake interview
Therapy Session	\$182	CPT Code 90837	53 minutes or longer
Therapy Session	\$160	CPT Code 90834	38-52 minutes (45)
Therapy Session	\$130	CPT Code 90832	16-37 minutes (30)
Family Therapy	\$200	CPT Code 90846	50 minutes
Family Therapy	\$200	CPT Code 90847	50 minutes

Please pay co-pay for each session at the beginning or the end of a session.
We kindly request you make your check out before each session begins, so that our time will be used best. Other payment of fee arrangements must be worked out before the end of our first meeting.

Telephone Consultations: There are times where telephone conversations are suitable or even needed at times in therapy. If so, PPA will charge the regular hourly fee, prorated over the time needed. If a therapist is needed to have a telephone conference with other professionals as part of your treatment, you will be billed for such service at the same rate as for regular therapy services. If you are concerned about this, please be sure to discuss it with the therapist in advance so we can set a n agreement that is comfortable for all involved.

Psychological Testing Services: A fee of \$200 per hour is charged. Psychological testing fees include the time spent with you, and the time needed for scoring and studying the test results. The amount of time involved depends on the tests used and the questions the testing is intended to answer.

Reports: PPA will charge the regular hourly fee, prorated over the time needed. Reports to Children Services, probation officers, the court, doctors, attorneys, etc. take a considerable amount of time to prepare. This includes both clerical and professional time. These fees will need to be paid prior to the release of your report. There are times a therapist may charge you for reports requested by insurance companies. A therapist will have to bill for any extra-long or complex reports the company might require. The therapist will consult you prior to any such occurrence as the company usually will not cover this fee.

Other Services: Such as, hospital visits, consultations with other therapists, home visits, or any court-related services (consultations with lawyers, depositions, or attendance at courtroom proceedings) will be based on the time involved in providing the service at the regular fee schedule. Some services may require payment in advance.

Special Court Note: There is a fee of \$200 per hour (portal-to-portal) for court appearances and depositions. This charge must be paid in advance of the scheduled court appearance. If full payment has not been received prior to 48 hours before the court hearing, your therapist may be unable to appear. Should the court date be cancelled, the fee is non-refundable. Expenses incurred for overnight stays will also be billed.

PPA does realize that the fees for services involve a substantial amount of money, although they are well in line with similar professionals' charges. For you to get the best value for your time and money, we must work hard and well.

Because PPA expects all payments at the time of our meetings, we usually do not send bills. However, if you have an agreement with your therapist that you will receive a bill, PPA asks that the bill be paid within 5 days of receipt. There will be a service charge on returned checks.

If you believe you may have trouble paying your balance on time, please discuss with your therapist. PPA will also raise the matter with you so we can arrive at a solution. If your unpaid balance reaches \$250, PPA will appraise you if the balance. If it remains unpaid, PPA may be forced to stop therapy. Fees that continue unpaid for 1days will be turned over to a collection agency and/or small-claims court.

If there are any problems with PPA charges, PPA billing, your insurance, or any other money-related point, please bring it to the attention of PPA. Such difficulties can interfere greatly with therapy.

Health Insurance Coverage and Payments

Many health insurance plans will help you pay for therapy. Because health insurance is written by many different companies, PPA cannot tell you what your plan covers. Please read your plan's booklet under your coverage for "Outpatient Psychotherapy" or under "Treatment of Mental and Nervous Conditions." Or call your insurer's office to find out what you need to know.

If your health insurance will pay for part of your therapists fee, PPA will help you with your insurance claims. However, please keep two things in mind:

- (1) PPA has no role in deciding what your insurance covers. Your employer decided which, if any, of therapy services will be covered and how much will be paid. You are responsible for checking your insurance coverage, deductibles, payment rates, co-payments, and so forth. Your insurance contract is between you and your company; it is not between PPA and the insurance company.
- (2) You - not your insurance company or any other person or company - are responsible for paying the fees we agree upon. If you ask PPA to bill a separated spouse, a relative, or an insurance company, and PPA does not receive payment on time, PPA will then expect this payment form you.

If You Need To Contact Your Therapist

PPA therapists do not take telephone calls when in a session with a client. When a therapist is unavailable, the telephone is answered by an answering machine that is frequently monitored. Your therapist will make every effort to return your telephone call on the same day you make it, with the exception of weekends and Holidays. If you are difficult to reach, please inform of some times when you will be available.

If you are unable to reach your therapist and it is an emergency, contact your family physician or go to the nearest emergency room.

If a therapist will be unavailable for an extended period of time, you will be provided with the name of a colleague to contact, if necessary.

Limits On Confidentiality

Counseling services are best provide in an atmosphere of trust. You expect your therapist to be honest with you about your concerns and progress. Your therapist expects you to be honest about your expectations for services, your compliance with medication, and any other barriers to treatment.

Your therapist will treat with great care all the information you share. It is your legal right that a session and session records about you are kept private. PPA will request you to sign a "Release of Information" form before speaking to or sending your records to another entity. In general, a therapist will not tell anyone what you have shared.

The therapist will not even reveal you are receiving treatment.

PPA kindly requests that you do not disclose the name or identity of any other client being seen in the office.

In all but a few rare situations, your confidentiality is protected by state law and by the rules of my profession.

There are some very special circumstances which are exceptions to this statement of confidentiality:

- (1) A therapist may occasionally find it helpful to consult other health and mental health professionals about a case. During a consultation, the therapist will make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of the client. The other professionals are also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you don't object, the therapist will not tell you about these consultations unless they believe it is important to your work together. The therapist will note all consultations in your Clinical Record (which is called PHI).
- (2) You should be aware that therapists practice with other mental health professionals and that, at times, employ administrative staff. In most cases, they need to share PHI 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 have been given training about protecting your privacy and have agreed not to release any information outside of the practice without the permission of a professional staff member.
- (3) PPA does have contracts with an accountant and a collection agency. As required by HIPAA, PPA has secured 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, PPA can provide you with the names of these organizations and/or a blank copy of this contract.
- (4) If you are involved in a court proceeding and a request is made for information concerning your evaluation, diagnosis or treatment, such information is protected by the therapist-client privilege law. A therapist cannot provide any information without your (or your personal or legal representative's) 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 a therapist to disclose information.

- (5) If a government agency is requesting information for health oversight activities, a therapist may be required to provide it for them.
- (6) If a client files a complaint or lawsuit against a therapist, the therapist may disclose relevant information regarding the client in order to defend oneself.
- (7) If a client files a worker's compensation claim, the client must execute a release so that the therapist may release the information, records or reports relevant to the claim.
- (8) If your fees are paid by a third party (such as an insurance company), certain details of your treatment (dates, fee, and diagnosis) must be revealed to obtain reimbursement. Insurance companies will sometimes ask for more information on symptoms, diagnoses, and a therapist's treatment methods. If this should occur your therapist will let you know and what the company asked for. Please understand that a therapist will have no control over how these records are handled at the insurance company. PPA has a policy to provide the minimum information necessary as the insurance company will need.
- (9) When a therapist is away from the office for a few days or extended, a trusted fellow therapist will cover. This therapist will be available to you in emergencies. Therefore, he/she will need to know about you. Generally, the therapist will tell this therapist only what he/she would need to know for an emergency.

Confidentiality and Legal Obligations

There are some situations in which a therapist is legally obligated to take actions, which are necessary to attempt to protect others from harm and the therapist may have to reveal some information about a client's treatment.

These situations are unusual at PPA but may happen.

- (1) If a therapist knows or has reason to suspect that a child under 18 years of age or an intellectually deficiency person, developmentally disabled, or physically impaired child under 21 years of age has suffered or faces a threat of suffering any physical or mental wound, injury, disability, or condition of a nature that reasonably indicates abuse or neglect of the child, the law requires a therapist to

file a report with the appropriate government agency, usually the Public Children Services Agency. Once such a report is filed, a therapist may be required to provide additional information.

(2) If a therapist has reasonable cause to believe that an adult is being abused, neglected, or exploited, or is in a condition which is the result of abuse, neglect, or exploitation, the law requires that the therapist report such belief to the county Department of Job and Family Services. Once such a report is filed, the therapist may be required to provide additional information.

(3) If a therapist knows or has reasonable cause to believe that a client has been the victim of domestic violence, the therapist must note that knowledge or belief and the basis for it in the client's record.

(4) If a therapist believes that a client presents a clear and substantial risk of minimum serious harm to him/herself or someone else and it is believed that disclosure of certain information may serve to protect that individual, then the therapist must disclose that information to appropriate public authorities, and/or the potential victim, and/or professional workers, and/or the family of the client.

If such a situation arises, the therapist will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action and the therapist will limit the 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 you may have now or in the future. The laws governing confidentiality can be quite complex, and therapists are not attorneys. In situations where specific advice is required, formal legal advice may be needed.

Professional Records

You can review your own records in the therapist file at time with your therapist. You may add to them or write an addendum. You can have copies of your records. PPA will keep your records in a locked and safe place.

Except in unusual circumstance that involve danger to yourself and others, you may examine and/or receive a copy of your Clinical Record if you request it in writing and the request is signed by you and dated not more than 60 days from the date submitted. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. For this reason, PPA recommends that you initially review them in the presence, or have them forwarded to another mental health professional so you can discuss the contents.

In most circumstances, the therapist is allowed to charge a copying fee of \$1 per page for the first ten pages, 50 cents per page for pages 11 through 50, and 20 cents per page for pages in excess of fifty, plus \$15 fee for records search, plus postage.

If I refuse your request for access to your Clinical Record, you have the right of review, which your therapist will discuss with you upon request.

If you request records of family or couple therapy (where there is more than one client), and you want to have any records of this therapy sent to anyone, all adults present will have to sign a Release of Information.

Minors and Parents

Children between the ages of 14 and 18 may independently consent to and receive up to 6 sessions of therapy (provided within a 30-day period) and no information about those sessions can be disclosed to anyone without the child's agreement. While privacy in therapy is often crucial to successful progress, particularly teenagers, parental involvement is also essential to successful treatment. For children 14 and over, it is the policy of PPA to request an agreement between the client and his/her parents allowing the therapist to share general information about the progress of the child's treatment and his/her attendance at scheduled sessions.

If the therapist assess the child is in danger or is a danger to someone else, in which case, the therapist will notify the parents of any concerns. Before giving parents any information, the therapist will discuss the matter with the child, if possible, and do their best to handle any objections he/she may have.

If the Therapist Needs to Contact Someone About You

If there is an emergency during the therapeutic relationship, or the therapist becomes concerned about your personal safety, the therapist is required by law and by the rules of the profession to contact someone close to you - perhaps a relative, spouse, or close friend. The therapist is also required to contact this person, or the authorities, if the therapist becomes concerned about you harming someone else. You will be required to write down the name and information of your chosen contact person on the face sheet provide to you when completing your initial paperwork.

Other Points...

Although there are three therapists in this office, each of us are responsible for the quality of care he or she provides.

If you ever become involved in a divorce or custody dispute, PPA would like you to understand and agree that we will not provide evaluations or expert testimony in court. You will need to hire a different mental health professional for any evaluations or testimony you require. This position is based on two factors: (1) The therapists statement will be seen as biased in your favor because we have a therapy relationship; and (2) the testimony might affect our therapy relationship, and the therapist must put the relationship first.

PPA does not discriminate against clients because of age, sex, marital/family status, race, color, religious beliefs, ethnic origin, place of residence, veteran status, physical disability, health status, sexual orientation, or criminal record unrelated to present dangerousness.

PPA is committed, as well as being required by federal, state, and local laws and regulations. PPA will always take steps to advance and support the values of equal opportunity, human dignity, and racial/ethical/cultural diversity. If you believe you have been discriminated against, please bring this matter to the attention of your therapist.

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