

Office Policies & Informed Consent for Treatment

Welcome to my practice. Your first visit to a new therapist is very important, and you may have many questions. This letter is to introduce myself and give you information to help you decide whether we can work together. Please take time to read it carefully and let me know if you have questions or need more information. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between us.

Qualifications

I am a psychologist licensed in the state of Texas (TX #34222). I earned my Doctor of Psychology or Psy.D. from Wright State University in 2006. I completed a pre-doctoral psychology internship at the University of South Florida's Counseling Center for Human Development and received postdoctoral training and supervision at Boston VA Medical Center and UT Health Houston. I have a experience in university counseling center, EAP, community clinic, private practice, and hospital settings providing general, health, and geriatric psychological services. I have served on medical school faculty where I supervised psychology and psychiatry trainees and continue to offer supervision. I stay up-to-date in my field through professional organizations and continuing education.

I work from an integrative perspective and rely on a broad range of techniques including multicultural feminist, existential, emotionally focused, and cognitive-behavioral/ acceptance and commitment therapies. As a psychologist, I bring certain expertise to our collaboration while you bring self-knowledge, the ability to learn from your life experiences, and a vision of what you want your life to be.

The Process of Therapy/Evaluation

During our first meetings, I will assess whether I can be of benefit to you. I do not accept clients who I believe I cannot help, and if this is the case, I will refer you to others who work well with your particular issues. Within a reasonable period of time after starting treatment, we will discuss my working understanding of your issues, my proposed treatment plan, and therapeutic objectives and possible outcomes of the therapy. If you have questions about any of the procedures used in the course of your therapy, their possible risks, my expertise in employing them, or about the treatment plan in general, please ask me. You also have the right to ask about other possible treatments for your condition and their risks and benefits. If you could benefit from treatment that I do not provide, I have an ethical obligation to assist you in obtaining that treatment and will do so accordingly.

Termination and Follow-Up

Deciding when to stop our work together is meant to be a mutual process. Before we stop, we will discuss how you will know if or when to come back or whether a regularly scheduled "check-in" might work best for you. If it is not possible for you to phase out of

therapy, I recommend that we have closure on the therapy process with at least two termination sessions.

Noncompliance with treatment recommendations may necessitate early termination of services. I will look at your issues with you and exercise my educated judgment about what treatment will be in your best interest. Your responsibility is to make a good faith effort to fulfill the treatment recommendations to which you have agreed. If you have concerns or reservations about my treatment recommendations, I strongly encourage you to express them so that we can resolve any differences or misunderstandings.

If during our work together I assess that I am not effective in helping you reach your therapeutic goals, I am obliged to discuss this with you and, if appropriate, terminate treatment and give you referrals that may be of help to you. If you request it and provide written authorization to do so, I may talk to the psychotherapist of your choice in order to help with the transition. If at any time you want another professional's opinion or wish to consult with another therapist, I will assist you in finding someone qualified. You have the right to terminate treatment at any time. If you choose to do so, I will offer to provide you with names of other qualified professionals whose services you might prefer.

If you commit violence against, verbally or physically threaten, or harass me, the office, or my family, I reserve the right to terminate your treatment unilaterally and immediately. Failure or refusal to pay for services after a reasonable time is another condition for termination of services. Please contact me to make arrangements when your financial situation changes.

Dual Relationships

Therapy never involves sexual, business, or any other dual relationships that could impair my objectivity, clinical judgment or therapeutic effectiveness or could be exploitative in nature. It is possible that during the course of your treatment, I may become aware of other preexisting relationships that may affect our work together, and I will do my best to resolve these situations ethically. Though rare and dependent upon the type of conflict, such an instance may entail our needing to stop working together. Please discuss this with me if you have any concerns.

Benefits and Risks of Psychotherapy

Participation in therapy can result in a number of benefits to you including improved mood and interpersonal relationships, increased coping strategies, and resolution of the specific concerns that led you to seek therapy. Working toward these benefits requires effort on your part. Psychotherapy requires your active involvement, honesty, and openness in order to change your thoughts, feelings, and/or behavior. I will ask for your feedback and views on your therapy and its progress. Sometimes more than one approach can be helpful.

During the initial evaluation or the course of therapy, remembering unpleasant events, feelings, or thoughts may result in your experiencing considerable discomfort, strong feelings, anxiety, depression, insomnia, etc. I may challenge some of your assumptions or perceptions or propose different ways of thinking about or handling situations that may cause you to feel upset, angry, or disappointed. Attempting to resolve issues that brought you into therapy may result in changes that were not originally intended. Psychotherapy may result in decisions to change behaviors, employment, substance use, schooling, housing, or relationships. Change can sometimes be quick and easy, but more often it can be gradual and even frustrating. There is no guarantee that psychotherapy will yield positive or intended results.

Emails, Phone Calls, and Emergencies

For small administrative matters such as checking appointment times or changing them, you are welcome to email me at dr_romeo@hushmail.com. I generally receive and return these emails within 24 hours except on weekends.

If you need to contact me between sessions about a clinical matter, please a message with my answering service at 713-954-8209. I receive messages daily. If I am planning on being out of town, I will let you know in advance. I will also let you know who I have covering for me if I plan not to take or respond to phone messages during my absence.

Emergency phone consultations of five minutes or less are normally free. However, if we spend more than five minutes in a week on the phone, if you leave more than five minutes worth of phone messages in a week, if I spend more than five minutes reading and responding to emails, I will bill you on a prorated basis for that time.

If you feel the need for many phone calls and cannot wait for your next appointment, we may need more frequent sessions to address your needs.

If an emergency situation arises, please clearly indicate it in your message to me. If your situation is an acute emergency and you need to talk to someone right away, contact the closest 24- hour emergency psychiatric service. Dial 911 or have a friend or family member transport you to the nearest emergency room. You can reach the Houston area crisis line 24/7 at 713-HOTLINE or 713-468-5463.

Cancellations and Lateness

Missed and cancelled sessions pose some issues for both of us. The work of psychotherapy is sometimes challenging and when we hit a difficult place together, it can feel easier to want to avoid coming in for treatment. I would prefer we speak about this intentionally rather than you canceling sessions. Also, I hold your scheduled appointment time specifically for you and you alone. I also see a limited number of patients so that I can give you the focus and attention you deserve. It is difficult for me to fill a last minute cancelled session on a short notice. Therefore, I charge for

appointments cancelled with less than 24 hours notice unless we can find another time that week that works for us both. If we are able to do so, before the weekend, I will allow you to reschedule at no extra fee.

If you are running late for your appointment, please phone or email me as soon as you can to let me know you will be late. If I do not hear from you by 20 minutes into your session, I will call to check on you and may assume you do not plan to attend your session. If you are late for your session, we will still end at our regular time so that I have time to prepare for my next appointments and I can be on time for them.

Payment and Financial Arrangements

Office Rates

Individual Therapy \$240 / 60 minutes
\$180 / 45 minutes

In-Home Rates

Individual Therapy \$300/ 60 minutes

Fees are to be paid at each session unless other arrangements have been made. If you are late to office appointments, we will end on time and not run over into the next person's session. I will make a cost of living fee increase in my rates at times. I will inform you of intended increases with a notice of two to three months.

Balances: I do not permit clients to carry a balance of more than two sessions and if you are unable to pay this balance, we will discuss whether it makes sense to pause your care or develop another strategy so that you can avoid incurring additional debt. Please let me know if any problem arises during the course of therapy regarding your ability to make timely payments.

Fee Reduction: I offer some lower fee slots, based upon income and circumstances, but I prefer to hold these slots for current clients who are experiencing life transitions. If my fee is a concern, please discuss it with me. If I am unable to accommodate your financial situation, I will provide you referrals.

Insurance: I do not take insurance. I can provide you with a monthly billing statement for reimbursement if you wish to submit it to your insurance company. This monthly statement is your receipt for tax or insurance purposes.

If you have outpatient mental health coverage, some or all your fees may be covered by your health insurance; however, insurance companies do not reimburse all conditions that may be the focus of psychotherapy. It is your responsibility to verify the specifics of your coverage. Please remember that my services are provided and charged to you, not your insurance company, so you are responsible for payment. Fees you pay for therapy services that are not reimbursed by insurance may be deductible as medical expenses

if you itemize deductions on your tax return. As described below in the section Health Insurance and Confidentiality of Records, be aware that submitting a mental health invoice for reimbursement carries a certain amount of risk.

Other fees: If you become involved in legal proceedings that require my participation, you will be expected to pay for my professional time and services even if I have been called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement and the interruption to my regular practice and possibly other employment, I charge \$300 per hour for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding. I will provide bills/receipts at the end of each session and expect to be paid upon receipt unless otherwise agreed upon.

Confidentiality

As a psychotherapy client, you have privileged communication. This means that your relationship with me as my client, all information disclosed in our sessions, and the written records of those sessions are confidential and may not be revealed to anyone without your written permission, except where law requires disclosure. Most of the provisions explaining when the law requires disclosure are described in the enclosed Notice of Privacy Practices.

When Disclosure Is Required by Law: Disclosure is required when there is a reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect of a child, person with a disability, or elder and when a client presents a danger to self, to others, to property, or is gravely disabled.

When Disclosure May Be Required: Disclosure may be required in a legal proceeding. If you place your mental status at issue in litigation that you initiate, the defendant may have the right to obtain your psychotherapy records and/or my testimony. If you have not paid your bill for treatment for a long period of time, your name, payment record and last known address may be sent to a collection agency or small claims court.

In couple or family therapy, the unit is the therapy client. This means that when individual members of a couple or family unit are seen individually as part that therapy, confidentiality and privilege between members of the couple or among individual family members do not apply, and all disclosures are part of the broader units' therapy. I will use clinical judgment and work with the discloser for when and how to reveal such information.

Emergencies: If there is an emergency during our work together or after termination in which I become concerned about your personal safety, the possibility of you injuring someone else, or about you receiving psychiatric care, I will do whatever I can within the limits of the law to prevent you from injuring yourself or another, and to ensure that you receive appropriate medical care. For this purpose I may contact the person whose name you have provided on your General Information form.

Health Insurance and Confidentiality of Records: Your health insurance carrier may require disclosure of confidential information in order to process claims. Only the minimum necessary information will be communicated to your insurance carrier, including diagnosis, the date and length of our appointments, and what services were provided. Often the billing statement and your company's claim form are sufficient. Sometimes treatment summaries or progress toward goals are also required. Unless explicitly authorized by you, Psychotherapy Notes will not be disclosed to your insurance carrier. While insurance companies claim to keep this information confidential, I have no control over the information once it leaves my office. Please be aware that submitting a mental health invoice for reimbursement carries some risk to confidentiality, privacy, or future eligibility or expense when obtaining health or life insurance.

Confidentiality of E-mail, Voice mail and Fax Communication: E-mail, voice mail, and fax communication can be easily accessed by unauthorized people, compromising the privacy and confidentiality of such communication. I do use hushmail, a service which promises secure, encrypted email. Please notify me at the beginning of treatment if you would like to avoid or limit in any way the use of any or all of these communication devices. Please do not contact me via email or faxes for emergencies.

Consultation: I consult regularly with other professionals regarding my clients in order to provide you with the best possible service. Names or other identifying information are never mentioned. Client identity remains completely anonymous and your confidentiality will be fully maintained. If, for some reason, I believe it is important to consult with another professional in-depth, and I believe identifying information about you may be shared, I will have you sign a release of information allowing me to share this information. Without such a release, I will not consult with another professional providing information that might lead another person to be able to identify you.

Release of Information: Considering all of the above exclusions, upon your request and with your written consent, I may release limited information to any person/agency you specify, unless I conclude that releasing such information might be harmful to you. If I reach that conclusion, I will explain the reason for denying your request.

Complaints

If you have a concern or complaint about your treatment, please talk with me about it. I will take your criticism seriously and respond with care and respect. If you believe that I've been unwilling to listen and respond or that I have behaved unethically, you can contact the Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists which oversees licensing. The Board will review the services I have provided.

Texas State Board of Examiners of Psychologists
333 Guadalupe

Tower 2, Room 450
Austin, TX 78701
General Business: 512-305-7700
Complaint Line: 1-800-821-3205
www.tsbep.texas.gov

You are also free to discuss your complaints about me with anyone you wish and you do not have any responsibility to maintain confidentiality about what I do that you don't like since you are the person who has the right to decide what you want kept confidential. I hope this answers some of your questions. Please let me know if you have concerns or questions about any of these policies and procedures or this agreement for working together in psychotherapy.