

Stephanie Brookins, LPC, LLC
1661 13th Street
Suite 102
Columbus, GA 31901
706-322-7911

OUTPATIENT SERVICES CONTRACT

Welcome to my practice. This document contains important information about my professional services and business policies. Please read it carefully and jot down any questions you might have so that we can discuss them at our next meeting. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between us.

COUNSELING SERVICES

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the therapist and patient, and the problems you bring forward. There are many different methods I may use to deal with the problems that you hope to address. Psychotherapy is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, it calls for a very active effort on your part. For the therapy to be most successful, you will have to work on things we talk about both during our sessions and at home. Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. On the other hand, psychotherapy has also been shown to have benefits for people who engage it. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. However, 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, I will be able to offer you some first impressions of what our work will include and a recommended treatment plan, if you decide to continue with therapy. You should evaluate this information along with your own opinions of whether you feel comfortable working with me. 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 my procedures, we should discuss them whenever they arise. If your doubts persist, I will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.

MEETINGS

I normally conduct an evaluation that will last from 2 to 4 sessions. During this time, we can both decide if I am the best person to provide the services you need to meet your treatment goals. If psychotherapy is begun, I will usually schedule one 55 -minute session (one appointment hour of 55 minutes' duration) per week at a time we agree on, although some sessions may be longer or more/less frequent. Once an appointment hour is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide 24 hours' notice of cancellation. **If adequate notice is not given, or the appointment is not kept, regardless of reason, there is a \$40.00 fee that must be paid prior to any further scheduling.** If it is possible, I will

try to find another time to reschedule the appointment. Repeatedly missed and/or rescheduled appointments may indicate a therapeutic issue that will need to be addressed. Therapy may be terminated and a referral provided if this issue is not resolved.

PROFESSIONAL FEES

After the initial assessment fee of \$160.00, my hourly fee is \$140.00. In addition to weekly appointments, I charge this amount for other professional services you may need, though I will break down the hourly cost if I work for periods of less than one hour. Other services include report writing, telephone conversations lasting longer than 10 minutes, attendance at meetings with other professionals you have authorized, preparation of records or treatment summaries, and the time spent performing any other service you may request of me. If you become involved in legal proceedings that require my participation, you will be expected to pay for my professional time even if I am called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement, I charge \$200.00 per hour for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding.

BILLING AND PAYMENTS

You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise or unless you have insurance coverage which requires another arrangement. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to when they are requested. In circumstances of unusual financial hardship, I may be willing to negotiate a fee adjustment or payment installment plan.

If your account has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements for payment have not been agreed upon, I have the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may involve hiring a collection agency or going through small claims court. If such legal action is necessary, its costs will be included in the claim. In most collection situations, the only information I release regarding a patient's treatment is his/her name, the nature of services provided, and the amount due.

INSURANCE REIMBURSEMENT

In order for us to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate your ability to financially commit to treatment with me. If you have a health insurance policy, it will usually provide some coverage for mental health treatment. I will fill out forms and provide you with whatever assistance I can in helping you receive the benefits to which you are entitled; however, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for your bill. It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

You should carefully read the section in your insurance coverage information that describes mental health services. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. I will provide you with whatever information I can based on my experience and will be happy to help you in understanding the information you receive from your insurance company.

Due to the rising costs of health care, insurance benefits have increasingly become more complex. It is sometimes difficult to determine exactly how much mental health coverage is available. “Managed Health Care” plans such as HMOs and PPOs often require authorization before they provide reimbursement for mental health services. These plans are often limited to short-term treatment approaches designed to work out specific problems that interfere with a person’s usual level of functioning. It may be necessary to seek approval for more therapy after a certain number of sessions. While a lot can be accomplished in short-term therapy, some patients feel that they need more services after insurance benefits end. Some managed-care plans will not allow me to provide services to you once your benefits end. If this is the case, I will do my best to find another provider who will help you continue.

You should also be aware that most insurance companies require you to authorize me to provide them with a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes I am required to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of the entire record (in rare cases). This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored in a computer. Though all insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, I have no control over what they do with it once it is in their hands. In some cases, they may share the information with a national medical information databank. I will provide you with a copy of any report I submit, if you request it.

CONTACTING ME

I am often not immediately available by telephone. While I am usually in my office between 9 AM and 5 PM, I probably will not answer the phone when I am with a client. When I am unavailable, my telephone is answered by an answering machine that I monitor frequently. I will make every effort to return your call on the same day you make it, except for weekends and holidays. If you are difficult to reach, please inform me of some times when you will be available. If you must contact me after hours, you can try me at my cell number – 706-392-9582. If you are unable to reach me and feel that you can’t wait for me to return your call due to a crisis, contact your family physician or the nearest emergency room. If I will be unavailable for an extended time, I will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact, if necessary. Please be aware of the limitations of confidentiality regarding electronic messages including those left on cell phones, answering machines or sent by email.

PROFESSIONAL RECORDS

The laws and standards of my profession require that I keep treatment records. You are entitled to receive a copy of your records (unless to do so would cause emotional damage), or I can prepare a summary for you instead. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. If you wish to see your records, I recommend that you review them in my presence so that we can discuss the contents. Patients will be charged an appropriate fee for any professional time spent in responding to information requests.

MINORS

If you are under eighteen years of age, please be aware that the law may provide your parents the right to examine your treatment records. It is my policy to request an agreement from parents that they agree to give up access to your records. If they agree, I will provide them only with general information about our work together, unless I feel there is a high risk that you will seriously harm yourself or someone else. In this case, I will notify them of my concern. I will also provide them with a summary of your treatment when it is complete. Before giving them any information, I will discuss the matter with you, if possible, and do my best to handle any objections you may have with what I am prepared to discuss.

CONFIDENTIALITY

In general, the privacy of all communications between a patient and a counselor is protected by law, and I can only release information about our work to others with your written permission. But there are a few exceptions.

In most legal proceedings, you have the right to prevent me from providing any information about your treatment. In some proceedings involving child custody and those in which your emotional condition is an important issue, a judge may order my testimony or subpoena your treatment record if he/she determines that the issues demand it. There are some situations in which I am legally obligated to act to protect others from harm, even if I must reveal some information about a patient's treatment. For example, if I believe that a child, elderly person, or disabled person is or has been abused or neglected, I must file a report with the appropriate state agency. If I believe that a patient is threatening serious bodily harm to another, I am required to take protective actions. These actions may include notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, or seeking hospitalization for the patient. If the patient threatens to harm himself/herself, I may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection. These situations have rarely occurred in my practice. If a similar situation occurs, I will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action.

I may occasionally find it helpful to consult other professionals about a case. During a consultation, I make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of my patient. The consultant is also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you don't object, I will not tell you about these consultations unless I feel that it is important to our work together.

If you choose to communicate with me via e-mail or cell phone, it is important that you are aware that there are limitations to my or your ability to protect your confidentiality. Please be aware that e-mail and other electronic transmissions cannot be guaranteed to be secure, confidential or error-free as information could be intercepted, corrupted, or sent in error to a third party. I recommend limiting any information you choose to communicate electronically.

Billing and scheduling services are provided by a third party. If you wish for my office to bill services to your insurance company, this individual has limited access to your record for billing purposes which may include, but is not limited to, any diagnosis, insurance policy information and general contact information. Billing is completed electronically. If you

