

## INFORMATION AND WORKING AGREEMENT

### Welcome to my practice!

Sometimes people say that therapy is only for weak people who need a prop to lean on. Don't believe it for a moment! Psychotherapy requires strength and courage, and a lot of commitment. It takes a lot of guts to look inside ourselves and figure out what's going on, and even more to let someone else share that journey with us.

Our first two or three sessions together are called the Assessment: they give us both the opportunity to consider whether we think we'll be able to work well together. It is important that you feel comfortable with me, and that I feel I have the right skills and experience to work with the issues you are bringing.

During the Assessment I will find out what is bringing you into therapy at this time and what you are hoping to get out of it. I will also take a thorough life history. I am interested in the whole person: body, mind, emotions, spirit, relationships, family and social context. Often events and patterns from the past still influence us in the present, even if we don't realise it, and exploring this will be an important part of the work.

Once the Assessment is complete, we will decide if we are both comfortable to proceed. If we are, we will move to the main part of the work. We will meet weekly, at least to begin with. Regularity and continuity are very important to good therapy.

I will encourage you to explore your thoughts, feelings, actions and circumstances, in order to help you gain greater understanding of the issues that have brought you into therapy, and, crucially, your own part in them. It's very important to understand from the outset that, while we may have influence over other people, the only person we have the power to change directly is ourselves. But we do have that power!

A crisis intervention may last only 2-3 sessions; dealing with one very specific problem might take a few weeks; but where there are several issues that are more complex and perhaps date back a long time, this is likely to involve working at greater depth, over a number of months or years. In shorter-term work, I will help you to identify the inner and external resources you have available to you; to develop your problem-solving skills; to recognise the choices you have; and, if you wish, to make changes. In longer-term work, we are likely additionally to be working towards finding more authenticity and autonomy in your life, while acknowledging the importance of intimacy and interdependence with others. Sensing real connections in our relationships is vital to us as human beings. Being able to experience this as part of the therapeutic relationship can help us to become more confident and genuine in the way we relate to other people in our lives.

You are an active partner, rather than a passive recipient, of this thing called therapy. Being as honest as you can during sessions is very important. The more you engage and participate in the work we do together, the more likely you are to find therapy helpful. You may need to work on the issues we discuss in session during the course of your week. I may give you suggestions on how to do this, such as books to read /writing exercises to do.

Although many people find therapy beneficial, it is not without risks. Don't be surprised if you find sessions challenging and difficult at times. You may get in touch with thoughts or feelings that you have previously preferred not to acknowledge, such as guilt, shame, anger or sadness. It would be misleading for me to guarantee specific outcomes, but if you are troubled at any time about your therapy, please don't hesitate to discuss this with me.

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### How will our therapeutic relationship work?

The therapeutic relationship is special and close, but it is different from a normal friendship. There are things that a counselling relationship can never be, "*but that what it is can nevertheless be relied upon*" (Lott, 1999 "In Session"). It is my responsibility as your therapist to set and maintain certain boundaries, such as those described below, which help to keep the relationship safe for both of us.

- 1) Each session will last 50 minutes; if you arrive late for a session, we will meet together for whatever time is remaining. Unfortunately, I do not have a receptionist or a waiting area, so to safeguard your confidentiality and that of other clients, please be so kind as to **wait until your appointed time before approaching the house**.
- 2) We have agreed that you will pay ..... for both assessment and ongoing therapy sessions. I review fees at the end of each financial year, but if your circumstances change in the meantime, please let me know.
- 3) Therapy works best when there is security and consistency in the arrangements between us. Because making an appointment means I keep a space in my diary for you in order to ensure I am available, I **need to charge the full fee for appointments missed or cancelled with less than one week's notice for any reason (including sickness)**. If you are unable to keep our next appointment, you need to let me know at the previous week's session if you want to avoid needing to pay. This helps me run my practice efficiently and fairly, and allows me to be reliable and available to you.

If you are not able to give me one week's notice of cancellation, but let me know you won't be attending before your session begins, I will do my best to offer you a replacement session (for no extra charge) during the same week, if I can. Please note, however, that I cannot guarantee this will be possible. Of course, you will not be charged in the unlikely event that I have to cancel a session we have booked (for example, due to illness).

I appreciate of course that everyone is entitled to take holidays, but if you miss or intend to be away for more than three weeks at a time when I am available to see you, and you would like me to keep the diary space open for you, we will discuss a 'holding fee' for the weeks that you are not here.

- 4) We will not normally have email or telephone contact outside of sessions, except for administrative reasons such as rearranging appointments, unless this has been agreed in advance. I do not link with clients or previous clients via social media.
- 5) You have the right at any time to stop coming to therapy, but ending should not be a spur of the moment decision. Indeed, if you find yourself having a strong, sudden urge to end, this is very likely to indicate something going on in the therapy that needs to be talked about! It is good practice for us to discuss your ending well in advance of the event, so that feelings about endings in general can be worked through, and any outstanding issues from the therapy can be discussed. It is therefore good to give me a minimum of two sessions' notice before ending.
- 6) Please don't bring children or pets to sessions. I have the right to end a session and potentially terminate therapy if I believe you to be coming to sessions intoxicated, or I sense a threat to my wellbeing.

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## Confidentiality

I fully appreciate that you will be trusting me with sensitive and personal information, and I take your privacy very seriously. I am registered with the Information Commissioner's Office under registration reference ZA124885.

The fact that you are coming to therapy is private to you, unless you choose to share it with others; so if I bump into you outside of a session, e.g. in Ampthill or at a social event, I won't acknowledge you unless you speak to me first.

There are a few exceptions to the general principle of confidentiality, as described below:

- 7) If you reveal to me during our sessions that someone is at risk, especially a child, I will encourage and support you to take necessary action (for example, to inform Social Services). If you are unable or unwilling to do so, I reserve the right to break confidentiality and contact the relevant agency myself.
- 8) I will not contact your GP or anyone else without your permission or knowledge, unless I believe you present or are at serious risk (for example, if you are psychotic or intentionally suicidal).
- 9) As a professional therapist, I regularly discuss my casework in confidence with a supervisor (who also upholds the same principles of confidentiality). Supervision helps therapists to offer as high a level of safety and quality of care as possible.
- 10) I make brief notes following each session. My notes do **not** have your name on. Notes are kept in a locked cabinet and password-protected on my PC and will not be shared with anyone (except my supervisor) without your permission, unless I am compelled to do so by a court. They are destroyed after seven years. You can find out about your rights to access the data I hold on you here <https://ico.org.uk/for-the-public/personal-information/> - just ask me if you want to know more.
- 11) Please note that non-payment of fees could ultimately result in legal action being taken, which might require me to give your name and address to a legal body.
- 12) If you are a psychotherapist or counsellor in training, other exceptions to confidentiality might apply: please ask if you would like further information.

I am an accredited Psychotherapist with a specialism in sexual and relationship difficulties. I am registered with the UK Council for Psychotherapy (UKCP) and accredited as a Sexual and Relationship Psychotherapist with the College of Sexual and Relationship Therapists (COSRT). I am also on the register accredited by the Professional Standards Authority that was set up by the Government to improve standards and safety for the benefit of the public. Being on an accredited register demonstrates my commitment to high professional standards. I abide by and am subject to my professional bodies' codes of ethics and complaints procedures. You can find out more about them as follows:

UKCP, America House, 2 America Square, London EC3N 2LU [www.psychotherapy.org.uk](http://www.psychotherapy.org.uk)

COSRT, PO Box 13686, London SW20 9ZH, Tel 020 8543 2707, [www.cosrt.org.uk](http://www.cosrt.org.uk)

**If you have any questions or concerns about this agreement, or are unclear or unhappy about any aspect of our work together, please don't hesitate to discuss this with me.**