

INFORMATION AND WORKING AGREEMENT

Welcome to my practice!

Sometimes people think that couples or relationship therapy is only for people who are on the verge of splitting up. Sometimes this is the case; but it can be a great idea to seek help long before things get to that stage, or even if you just feel your relationship isn't making you as happy as it should be.

Our first couple of sessions together are called the Assessment: they give us 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 take you through some ground rules that help relationship therapy to be safe and to succeed, and we will decide if we are happy to proceed. If we are, I will go on to take a thorough life and relationship history for you. Often we find that 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 move to the main part of the work. We will probably meet weekly to begin with, although we may decide later that more or less often would be more helpful. Regularity and continuity are very important to good therapy.

I will encourage you to explore your circumstances, thoughts, feelings and behaviours in the relationship, in order to help you to gain greater understanding of the issues that have brought you into therapy. Crucially, I will help you to understand the part you may be playing in creating or maintaining the problems in your relationship. You are an active partner in the therapeutic process, rather than a passive recipient. Being as honest as you can during sessions is important. The more you participate and engage 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 or 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 sometimes. You may get in touch with thoughts or feelings that you have previously preferred not to acknowledge, such as guilt, shame, anger or sadness. In couples therapy, you may even feel "got at" sometimes, if the focus seems to be on your behaviour that week - but don't worry, things will even up at another session! It would be misleading for me to guarantee specific outcomes, but if you are concerned at any time about your couples therapy, please do not hesitate to discuss this with me.

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 all of us.

- 1) Couples therapy sessions last 60 minutes, and you should arrive together; individual psychosexual therapy sessions 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 my 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 having 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 four sessions at a time when I am available to see you, and you would like me to keep the diary space open for you, we may discuss a 'holding fee' for the weeks that you are not here.

- 4) 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 some time, this is likely to involve working at greater depth, over a number of months or longer.
- 5) 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.
- 6) 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.
- 7) 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.

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 want to share it with others; so if I bump into you outside of a session, e.g. in Ampthill or 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:

- 8) If you reveal to me during our sessions that someone else 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.
- 9) 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).
- 10) 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.
- 11) I will make brief notes following each session. My notes do **not** have your name on. They 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. Be aware that notes of couples therapy belong to both parties, and neither may request access for a third party without the other's permission. You can find out about your right 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.
- 12) 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.
- 13) 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

COSRT, PO Box 13686, London SW20 9ZH, Tel 020 8543 2707, 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.

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