

## Information for Clients

This packet answers some questions clients often ask about any therapy practice. It is important to me that you know how we will work together. I believe our work will be most helpful to you when you have a clear idea of what we are trying to do.

After you read this packet we can discuss, in person, how these issues apply to your own situation. This brochure is yours to keep and refer to later. Please read all of it and mark any parts that are not clear to you. Write down any questions you think of, and we will discuss them at our next meeting. When you have read and fully understood this brochure, I will ask you to sign it at the end. I will sign it as well and make a copy, so we each have one.

### About Psychotherapy

The type of therapy I do is called "Cognitive Behavioral Therapy".

People often believe that our behaviors and feelings are caused by what happens in the real world. However, this is not quite true. When we have any kind of experience, it does not affect us directly. Rather, we first give it a meaning through our beliefs about it. For example, if I hear a sound in the kitchen and believe it is made by my spouse, I am not bothered at all. But if I believe I am alone in the house, the same sound can bother me a great deal. Here we see that feelings and behaviors (my actions about the sound) flow from the active process of thinking about or adding meaning to the actual event (the sound).

My therapy separates beliefs into two kinds: "rational" beliefs, or ones based on reality and logic, and "irrational" beliefs, or ones based on false or unrealistic ideas. When we have irrational beliefs, we suffer from strong negative emotions (like rage, depression, and anxiety). When we act on the basis of irrational beliefs, our actions are often not effective and can even be harmful. If we have rational beliefs, we will experience more of the positive emotions (like pleasure, hope, and joy). We can still feel the mildly negative emotions, like irritation, sadness, and concern, but our behaviors will be more effective.

I think of my approach to helping people with their problems as an educational one. Anyone can learn to recognize irrational beliefs, dispute them, and replace them with more rational beliefs. We can, with practice, unlearn these beliefs and become happier persons who function better in the world. This is what I mean by an educational approach.

I want you to be able to use these cognitive techniques without me. I encourage you to learn more about what methods are used in Cognitive therapy; how well it works, and what possible problems or side effects it may have. I may give you copies of articles or handouts that are yours to keep, or loan you books to better your understanding of the therapy process.

I view therapy as a partnership between us. You define the problem areas to be worked on; I use some special knowledge to help you make the changes you want to make. Psychotherapy is not like visiting a medical doctor. It requires your very active involvement. It requires your best efforts to change thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. For example, I want you to tell me about important experiences, what they mean to you, and what strong feelings are involved. This is one of the ways you are an active partner in therapy.

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An important part of your therapy will be practicing new skills that you will learn in our sessions. I will ask you to practice outside our meetings, and we will work together to set up homework assignments for you. I might ask you to do exercises, to keep records, and perhaps to do other tasks to deepen your learning. You will probably have to work on relationships in your life and make long-term efforts to get the best results. These are important parts of personal change. Change will sometimes be easy and quick, but more often it will be slow and frustrating, and you will need to keep trying.

Most of my clients see me once a week for 3 to 4 months. After that, we meet less often for several more months. Therapy then usually comes to an end. The process of ending therapy, called "termination," can be a very valuable part of our work. Stopping therapy should not be done casually, although either of us may decide to end it if we believe it is in your best interest. If you wish to stop therapy at any time, I ask that you agree now to meet then for at least one session to review our work together. We will review our goals, the work we have done, any future work that needs to be done, and our choices.

### **The Benefits and Risks of Therapy**

As with any kind of treatment, there are some risks as well as benefits with therapy. You should think about both the benefits and risks when making any treatment decisions. For example, in therapy there is a risk that clients will, for a time, have uncomfortable levels of sadness, guilt, anxiety, anger, frustration, loneliness, helplessness, or other negative feelings. These feelings or memories may end up bothering a client at work or in school. Also, clients in therapy may have problems with people important to them. Therapy may disrupt a marital relationship and may even lead to a divorce. Sometimes, a client's problems may temporarily worsen after the beginning of treatment. Most of these risks are to be expected when people are making important changes in their lives. Finally, even with our best efforts, there is a risk that therapy may not work out well for you.

While you consider these risks, you should know also that the benefits of therapy have been shown by scientists in hundreds of well-designed research studies. People who are depressed may find their mood lifting. Others may no longer feel afraid, angry, or anxious. In therapy, people have a chance to talk things out fully until their feelings are relieved or the problems are solved. Clients' relationships and coping skills may improve greatly. They may get more satisfaction out of social and family relationships. Their personal goals and values may become clearer. They may grow in many directions—as persons, in their close relationships, in their work or schooling, and in the ability to enjoy their lives.

### **Consultations**

If you could benefit from a treatment I cannot provide, I will help you to get it. You have a right to ask me about such other treatments, their risks, and their benefits. Based on what I learn about your problems, I may recommend a medical exam or use of medication. If I do this, I will discuss my reasons with you, so that you can decide what is best. If you are treated by another professional, I will coordinate my services with them and with your own medical doctor.

If for some reason treatment is not going well, I might suggest you see another therapist or another professional in addition to me. As a responsible person and ethical therapist, I cannot continue to treat you if my treatment is not working for you. If you wish for another professional's opinion at any time, or

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wish to talk with another therapist, I can help you find a qualified person and will provide him or her with the information needed.

### **What to Expect from Our Relationship**

As a professional, I will use my best knowledge and skills to help you. This includes following the standards of my licensing organization. In your best interests, these organizations put limits on the relationship between a therapist and a client, and I will abide by these. Let me explain these limits, so you will not think they are personal responses to you.

First, state laws and the rules of the licensing organizations require me to keep what you tell me confidential (that is, private). You can trust me not to tell anyone else what you tell me, except in certain specific situations. I explain what those are in the "About Confidentiality" section of this brochure. Here I want to explain that I try not to reveal who my clients are. This is part of my effort to maintain your privacy. **If we meet on the street or socially, I may not say hello or talk to you very much. My behavior will not be a personal reaction to you, but a way to maintain the confidentiality of our relationship.**

Second, in your best interest, I can only be your therapist. I cannot have any other role in your life. I cannot, now or ever, be a close friend or socialize with any of my clients. I cannot be a therapist to someone who is already a friend. I can never have a romantic relationship with any client during, or after, the course of therapy. I cannot have a business relationship with any of my clients, other than the therapy relationship.

### **About Confidentiality**

I will treat with great care all the information you share with me. It is your legal right that our sessions and my records about you are kept private. That is why I ask you to sign a "release-of-records" form before I can talk about you or send my records about you to anyone else. In general, I will tell no one what you tell me. I will not even reveal that you are receiving treatment from me.

In all but a few rare situations, your privacy is protected by state law and by the rules of my profession. Here are the most common cases in which confidentiality **is not** protected:

1. If you were sent to me by a court or an employer for evaluation or treatment, the court or employer expects a report from me. If this is your situation, please talk with me before you tell me anything you do not want the court or your employer to know. You have a right to tell me only what you are comfortable telling.
2. Are you suing someone or being sued? Are you being charged with a crime? If so, and you tell the court that you are seeing me, I may then be ordered to show the court my records. Please consult your lawyer about these issues.
3. If you make a serious threat to harm yourself or another person, the law requires me to try to protect you or that other person. This usually means telling others about the threat, including informing authorities regarding possession of firearms. I cannot promise never to tell others about threats you

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make. I consider "cutting" on yourself to be a gesture of suicide and if you are engaging in that behavior I will tell someone close to you who can protect you.

4. If I believe a child has been or is being abused or neglected, I am legally required to report this to the authorities.

There are two situations in which I might talk about part of your case with another therapist. I ask now for your understanding and agreement to let me do so in these two situations.

First, when I am away from the office for a few days, I have a trusted fellow therapist "cover" for me. This therapist will be available to you in emergencies. Therefore, he or she needs to know about you. Of course, this therapist is bound by the same laws and rules as I am to protect your confidentiality.

Second, I sometimes consult other therapists or other professionals about my clients. This helps me in giving high-quality treatment. These persons are also required to keep your information private. Your name will never be given to them, and they will be told only as much as they need to know to understand your situation.

I also ask you not to disclose the name or identity of any other client you may recognize being seen in this office.

Also, please be aware that I will make every effort to keep texts, emails, FaceTime, or telephone calls confidential. Calls between us will be made in a secure location and computers and cell phones are password protected and kept in secure locations. I will, on a case by case basis, offer telephone or video sessions. If you elect to conduct a session via these options, please know that I cannot guarantee confidentiality and you agree to hold DeFrancisco and Associates, LLC and myself harmless should a breach occur.

If your records need to be seen by another professional, or anyone else, I will discuss it with you. If you agree to share these records, you will need to sign a release form. This form states exactly what information is to be shared, with whom, and why, and it also sets time limits. You may read this form at any time. If you have questions, please ask me.

It is my office policy to destroy clients' records 6 years after the end of our therapy. Until then, I will keep your case records in a safe place.

If we do family or couple therapy (where there is more than one client), and you want to have my records of this therapy sent to anyone, all of the adults present will have to sign a release.

As part of cost control efforts, an insurance company will sometimes ask for more information on symptoms, diagnoses, and my treatment methods. It will become part of your permanent medical record. Please understand that I have no control over how these records are handled at the insurance company. My policy is to provide only as much information as the insurance company will need to pay your benefits. Please understand that this "compromise" of your privacy is the cost of having your insurance pay for your sessions.

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You can review your own records in my files at any time. You may add to them or correct them, and you can have copies of them. I ask you to understand and agree that you may not examine records created by anyone else and sent to me.

In some very rare situations, I may temporarily remove parts of your records before you see them. This would happen if I believe that the information will be harmful to you, but I will discuss this with you.

### **About Our Appointments**

The very first time I meet with you, we will need to give each other much basic information. For this reason, I usually schedule 1 full hour for this first meeting. Following this, we will usually meet for a 45-50-minute session once a week. If I am ever unable to start on time, I ask your understanding. I also assure you that you will receive the full time agreed to. If you are late, we will probably be unable to meet for the full time, because it is likely that I will have another appointment after yours.

I will try to reserve a regular appointment time for you into the foreseeable future. If you have to cancel an appointment, you can assume that we will meet again the following week at your regular time. **Please note I require a 48 hour notice for canceled appointments. You (not your insurance company) will be charged \$75.00 for sessions cancelled with less than 48 hours notice**, for other than the most serious reasons. I, in turn, will afford you as much time as possible if I ever need to cancel one of our appointments.

If thirty days passes and you have not successfully attended a session, then your file will be closed. This simply means that you are no longer receiving our services or under our care. If you desire to return for treatment you can do so at any time and your file will simply be re-opened.

### **Fees, Payments, and Billing**

Payment for services is an important part of any professional relationship. This is even truer in therapy; one treatment goal is to make relationships and the duties and obligations they involve clear. You are responsible for seeing that my services are paid for.

My current regular fees are as follows. You will be given advance notice if my fees should change.

Regular therapy services: If you choose to pay "out of pocket" for my services, the fees are as follows: for the initial assessment (Diagnostic evaluation) (90791)-\$200; Individual sessions (90837, 53 - 58 minutes) - \$165; Individual sessions (90834, 38 - 52 minutes) - \$135 and Family sessions (90847) - \$185.00. ( Please plan to pay for each session at its end. I suggest you make out your check before each session begins, so that our time will be used best. Other payment or fee arrangements must be worked out before the end of our first meeting. If you are utilizing your insurance benefits, your portion (or co-pay) is due at the end of each session.

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Telephone consultations: I believe that telephone consultations may be suitable or even needed at times in our therapy. If so, I will charge you our regular fee, prorated over the time needed. If I need to have long telephone conferences with other professionals as part of your treatment, you will be billed for these at the same rate as for regular therapy services. If you are concerned about all this, please be sure to discuss it with me in advance so we can set a policy that is comfortable for both of us. Of course, there is no charge for calls about appointments or similar business.

E mail contact: I often use email as a means to communicate with my clients between sessions. The type of communication that is appropriate consists of "business" topics including: insurance issues, changing, confirming or making appointments, arrangement of payment etc. I do not, under any circumstances, conduct therapy/counseling over email/computer and my communications in this venue should not be construed as such.

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

I will assume that our agreed-upon fee-paying relationship will continue as long as I provide services to you. I will assume this until you tell me in person, by telephone, or by certified mail that you wish to end it. You have a responsibility to pay for any services you receive before you end the relationship.

If you think you may have trouble paying your bills on time, please discuss this with me. I will also raise the matter with you so we can arrive at a solution. If your unpaid balance reaches \$300.00, I will notify you by phone or mail. If it then remains unpaid, I will stop therapy with you. Fees that continue unpaid after this will be turned over to a collection service.

If there is any problem with my charges, my billing, your insurance, or any other money-related point, please bring it to my attention. I will do the same with you. Such problems can interfere greatly with our work. They must be worked out openly and quickly.

### **If You Need to Contact Me**

I cannot promise that I will be available at all times. You can always leave a message on my answering machine, and I will return your call as soon as I can. Generally, I will return messages daily except on Sundays and holidays. If you are the kind of person who feels they may need frequent contact between sessions, then we should discuss whether or not I am the right therapist of you.

### **Other Points**

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



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I, the therapist, have met with this client (and/or his or her parent or guardian) for a suitable period of time, and have informed him or her of the issues and points raised in this brochure. I have responded to all of his or her questions. I believe this person fully understands the issues, and I find no reason to believe this person is not fully competent to give informed consent to treatment. I agree to enter into therapy with the client, as shown by my signature here.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of therapist

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

I truly appreciate the chance you have given me to be of professional service to you, and look forward to a successful relationship with you.

Copy accepted by client

Copy kept by therapist