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## PRIVACY PROTECTION NOTICE

THIS NOTICE DESCRIBES HOW YOUR MENTAL HEALTH RECORDS MAY BE USED AND DISCLOSED AND HOW YOU CAN GET ACCESS TO THIS INFORMATION.  
PLEASE READ IT CAREFULLY.

*This notice shall go into effect April 15, 2011 and remain so unless new notice provisions effective for all protected health information are enacted accordingly.*

### I. Preamble

A recent United State Supreme Court decision held that communications between psychotherapists and their clients are privileged and, therefore, are protected from forced disclosure in cases arising under federal law. There is a difference between privileged conversations and documentation in your mental health records. Records are kept documenting your care as required by law, professional standards, and other review procedures. HIPAA very clearly defines what kind of information is to be included in your "Designated Medical Record" as well as some material, known as "Psychotherapy Notes" which is not accessible to insurance companies and other third-party reviewers and in some cases, not to the client himself/herself. HIPAA provides privacy protections about your personal health information, which is called "protected health information" (PHI) which could personally identify you. **PHI consists of three (3) components: *treatment, payment, and health care operations.***

***Treatment*** refers to activities in which I provide, coordinate or manage your mental health care or other services related to your mental health care. Examples include a psychotherapy session, psychological testing, or talking to your primary care physician about your medication or overall medical condition.

***Payment*** is when I obtain reimbursement for your mental health care. The clearest example of this parameter is filing insurance on a client's behalf. (Please note that I do not file insurance for clients.)

***Health care operations*** are activities related to the performance of my practice such as quality assurance. In mental health care, the best example of health care operations is when utilization review occurs, a process in which your insurance company reviews our work together to see if your care is "really medically necessary."

The ***use*** of your protected health information refers to activities my office conducts for scheduling appointments, keeping records and other tasks *within* my office related to your care.

***Disclosures*** refer to activities you authorize which occur *outside* my office such as the sending of your protected health information to other parties (i.e., your primary care physician, the school your child attends).

### II. Uses and Disclosures of Protected Health Information Requiring Authorization

The law requires authorization and consent for treatment, payment and healthcare operations. I may disclose PHI for the purposes of treatment, payment and healthcare operations with your consent. You have signed this general consent to care and authorization to conduct payment and health care operations, authorizing me to provide treatment and to conduct administrative steps associated with your care. Additionally, if you ever want me to send any of your protected health information of any sort to anyone outside my office, you will always first sign a specific authorization to release information to this outside party. A copy of that authorization form is available upon the request. The requirement of your signing an additional authorization form is an added protection to help insure your protected health information is kept strictly confidential. An example of this type of release of information might be your request that I talk to your child's schoolteacher about his/her OCD and what this teacher might do to be of help to your child. Before I talk to that teacher, you will have first signed the proper authorization for me to do so.

There is a third, special authorization provision potentially relevant to the privacy of your records: my psychotherapy notes. In recognition of the importance of the confidentiality of conversations between psychotherapist-client in

treatment settings, HIPAA permits keeping separate “psychotherapy notes” separate from the overall “designated medical record.” “Psychotherapy notes” cannot be secured by insurance companies nor can they insist upon their release for payment of services. “Psychotherapy notes” are *my* notes “recorded in any medium by a mental health provider documenting and analyzing the contents of a conversation during a private, group or joint family counseling session and separated from the rest of the individual’s medical record.” “Psychotherapy notes” are necessarily more private and contain much more personal information about you hence, the need for increased security of the notes. “Psychotherapy notes” are not the same as your “progress notes” which provide the following information about your care each time you have an appointment at my office: medication prescriptions and monitoring, assessment/treatment start and stop times, the modalities of care, frequency of treatment furnished, results of clinical tests, and any summary of your diagnosis, functional status, treatment plan, symptoms, prognosis and progress to date. Certain payors of care, such as Medicare and Workers Compensation, require the release of both your progress notes and my psychotherapy notes in order to pay for your care. If I am forced to submit your psychotherapy notes in addition to your progress notes for reimbursement for services rendered, you will sign an additional authorization directing me to release my psychotherapy notes. Most of the time I will be able to limit reviews of your protected health information to only your “designated record set” which include the following: all identifying paperwork you completed when you first started your care here, all billing information, a summary of our first appointment, your mental status examination, your individualized, comprehensive treatment plan, your discharge summary, progress notes, reviews of you care by managed care companies, results of psychological testing, and any authorization letters or summaries of care you have authorized me to release on your behalf. Please note that the actual test questions or raw data of psychological tests, which are protected by copyright laws and the need to protect clients from unintended, potentially harmful use, are not part of your “designated mental health record.” You may, in writing, revoke all authorizations to disclose protected health information at any time. You cannot revoke an authorization for an activity already done that you instructed me to do or if the authorization was obtained as a condition for obtaining insurance and the insurer has the right to contest the claim under the policy.

### **III. Business Associates Disclosures**

HIPAA requires that I train and monitor the conduct of those performing ancillary administrative service over my therapeutic work and refers to these people as “Business Associates.” I do consult with business associates to assist with my administrative matters and these business associates are indeed trained and monitored so that your privacy is ensured at all times.

### **IV. Uses and Disclosures Not Requiring Consent nor Authorization**

By law, protected health information may be released without your consent or authorization for the following reasons:

- Child Abuse
- Suspected Sexual Abuse of a Child
- Adult and Domestic Abuse
- Health Oversight Activities (i.e., licensing board for Professional Counselors in Georgia)
- Judicial or Administrative Proceedings (i.e., if you are ordered here by the court)
- Serious Threat to Health or Safety (i.e., out “Duty to Warn” Law, national security threats)
- Workers Compensation Claims (if you seek to have your care reimbursed under Workers Compensation, all of your care is automatically subject to review by your employer and/or insurer(s).

I never release any information of any sort for marketing purposes.

### **V. Client’s Rights and My Duties**

You have a right to the following:

- *The right to request restrictions* on certain uses and disclosures of your protected health information, which I may or may not agree to, but if I do, such restrictions shall apply unless our agreement is changed in writing;
- *The right to receive confidential communications by alternative means and at alternative locations.* For example, you may not want your correspondence sent to your home address so I will send them to another location of your choosing;
- *The right to inspect and receive a copy* of your protected health information in my designated mental health record set and any billing records for as long as protected health information is maintained in the records;
- *The right to amend* material in your protected health information, although I may deny an improper request and/or respond to any amendment(s) you make to your record of care;
- *The right to an accounting of non-authorized disclosures* of your protected health information;
- *The right to a paper copy* of notices/information from me, even if you have previously requested electronic transmission of notices/information; and
- *The right to revoke your authorization* of your protected health information except to the extent that action has already been taken.

For more information on how to exercise each of these aforementioned rights, please do not hesitate to ask me for further assistance on these matters. I am required by law to maintain the privacy of your protected health information and to provide you with a notice of your Privacy Rights and my duties regarding your PHI. I reserve the right to change my privacy policies and practices as needed with these current designated practices being applicable unless you receive a revision of my policies when you come for your future appointment(s). My duties as a counselor on these matters include maintaining the privacy of your protected health information, to provide you this notice of your rights and my privacy practices with respect to your PHI, and to abide by the terms of this notice unless it is changed and you are so notified.

## **VI. Complaints**

If you have any concerns of any sort that my office may have compromised your privacy rights, please do not hesitate to contact me immediately. You can reach me by letter at 2993 Sandy Plains Road, Suite 125, Box 4, Marietta, GA 30066 or by phone at 404-632-4804. You may also send a written complaint to the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

## **CLIENT NOTIFICATION OF PRIVACY RIGHTS**

The Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA) has created new client protections surrounding the use of protected health information. Commonly referred to as the “medical records privacy law,” HIPAA provides client protections related to the electronic transmission of data (the transaction rules), the keeping and use of client records (“privacy rules”), and storage and access to health care records (“the security rules”). HIPAA applies to all health care providers, including mental health care, and providers and health care agencies throughout the country are now required to provide clients a notification of their privacy rights as it relates to their health care records. You may have already received similar notices such as this one from your other health care providers.

As you might expect, the HIPAA law and regulations are extremely detailed and difficult to grasp if you don’t have formal legal training. My Client Notification of Privacy Rights is my attempt to inform you of your rights in a simple yet comprehensive fashion. Please read this document as it is important you know what client protections HIPAA affords all of us. In mental health care, confidentiality and privacy are central to the success of the therapeutic relationship and as such, you will find I will do all I can to protect the privacy of your mental health records. If you have any questions about any of the matters discussed in this document, please do not hesitate to ask me for further clarification.

By law, I am required to secure your signature indicating you have received the Client Notification of Privacy Rights Document. Thank you for your thoughtful consideration of these matters.

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