Beverly Swann, MA, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

**Introduction**

Greetings and welcome. This *Psychotherapy Client Information Package* will answer many of your questions about my therapy services. It is an honor to meet with you and walk along the path with you on your journey of change and exploration. Please feel free to ask me any questions you have, at any time, about anything contained in this document or anything that you feel is missing.

# Goals and Benefits of Psychotherapy

Many factors come into play in the therapy process. It’s not always possible to predict the exact methods or outcomes of therapy. Therapists have different personalities and work with different theories and techniques, so sometimes a client and therapist just don’t hit it off. Sometimes the therapy moves in an unexpected direction, or life events (change in job, death in family, etc.) change the focus of therapy. Sometimes, the results of therapy may not be what you originally expected and can even be unsettling. For example, you may discover that you have a career interest that changes the direction of your life or the relationships you currently have.

Through regular treatment planning and updates, I aim to help you reach your goals and minimize disruptions to your life. Our first session will be mostly assessment – an information gathering session that helps me to understand the issues you are dealing with and what you would like to achieve. In the beginning it may not feel like anything is improving, and occasionally it may feel like things are getting worse. Please let me know about these feelings, as well as giving me the time to gain a full understanding to put together a treatment plan with you.

**Treatment Planning, Frequency, and Length of Treatment**

Treatment planning is a process where strengths and goals are identified and a plan to reach your goals is created. This is usually done after the second or third session and then again every 3-6 months, depending on the client. We will work together to come up with an individualized plan for you.

Most clients respond best to weekly therapy sessions, particularly in the early stages of therapy. We will discuss how often to meet in our first session. The length of treatment depends on many different factors, including your goals for therapy, your background and beliefs, your attendance, and life events that happen while in therapy. Therapy is about change, and sometimes that change happens quickly while other times it takes awhile. Part of the treatment planning process includes monitoring your progress and periodically deciding whether to continue therapy.

You (the client) decide when to begin therapy and when to end. I encourage clients to discuss their concerns with me so that we can facilitate a rewarding ending to our work together. For new clients I ask that they attend at least three sessions before making a decision to end so that we get to know each other and decide whether we are a “fit” for therapy. If we are not a fit, I am happy to provide a referral to another therapist.

# Confidentiality and Limits

Confidentiality is essential to trust in the therapy room, and I make every effort to protect your confidential information. It is important to know that there are certain instances where I may be required by law to release information:

* If I have a reasonable suspicion of abuse of a child, disabled person, or an elderly person, I am required to report it to appropriate authorities. As of January 1, 2015, the definition of child abuse has been expanded to include the electronic downloading or viewing of obscene images of anyone under the age of 18. *Obscene* includes nudity and sexually suggestive positions, and sexting among teenagers is covered by this law.
* If a client is a danger to self or others, I may need to release enough information to ensure everyone’s safety.
* In the event of a court order to appear in court or produce your records when you have not signed a release form for me to do so, I will work with an attorney to take whatever steps I am allowed to protect your privacy.
* When third parties pay for treatment, such as insurance plans which pay for therapy or regulatory agencies which have mandated therapy, they may require that I provide some confidential information. In these cases, I will discuss the information being released ahead of time with you and ask you to sign a Release of Information Form that describes what I may release and to whom.

Additionally I may consult with other professionals from time to time to ensure that I am providing the best treatment possible. The focus of these consultations is treatment options and approaches, and I avoid using information that will identify you personally. Client files are maintained for seven years after treatment ends, with the exception of files for minors. These files are maintained for seven years after the minor reaches age 18.

*Confidentiality with adolescents*: When a minor is in therapy, it is natural for parents to want to know everything that goes on; however most teens feel a need for privacy in the therapy room. Whenever there is a direct safety issue parents are always informed, though I attempt to tell the teen first so he or she is not surprised. In all other cases, I tell minors that I will keep what they say in session private but I may feel that there are some things their parents need to know, and that their parents also need to know how things are going from time to time. We work together to find an appropriate way to tell parents; I encourage minors to tell their parents themselves whenever possible.

*Confidentiality with families and couples*: When therapy involves more than one person, secrets can become a problem. I sometimes meet with individual members of a couple or family in order to gain better insight into each person. If something is revealed during one of these meetings that has not yet been revealed to the rest of the group, you will need to inform me that it is a secret and we will need to negotiate how this will be handled on an ongoing basis. Generally, I encourage clients to share information directly with the other people involved.

*Meetings in public places*: We may run into each other in a restaurant or store. If this happens, to protect your privacy, I will not say anything to you unless you speak to me first.

# Fees and Payment Options

The regular fee is $125.00 per 50-minute client session and includes the following services:

* Actual time spent in session
* Time spent in preparation for the session
* Time spent on usual and customary paperwork and treatment planning
* Time spent in consultation, training, and research
* Short telephone calls or emails (less than 15 minutes time) with the client for the purposes of scheduling or support

Fees are agreed upon before the first therapy session. Fees are reviewed annually and may be raised by approximately $5 per year. If this occurs, we will discuss the fee change and how it may affect your therapy well in advance. In some circumstances, the fee may be reduced on a case-by-case basis for an agreed upon period of time. If you have a change in insurance coverage or financial situation, it is your responsibility to inform me so that the fee can be adjusted.

Fees are due at the beginning of each session unless other arrangements have been made. Payment may be made in the form of cash, personal check, money order, or credit card.

**Checks should be made out to *Beverly Swann***. Returned checks or denied credit card charges will result in an additional charge of $35.00.

**Insurance Coverage**

For clients who have out-of-network insurance benefits, I am willing to bill your insurance and receive payment from them directly. An active credit card agreement must be kept on file to cover any unreimbursed expenses. Most Preferred Provider Organizations (PPOs) will allow you to choose a therapist out-of-network and may allow me to bill them directly. For insurance panels I am credentialed with, I am willing to bill and receive payment directly. An active credit card agreement must be kept on file to cover any unreimbursed expenses. I can provide an invoice at the end of each month to give to your insurance company for reimbursement if they provide that coverage.

It is your responsibility to contact your insurance company to determine eligibility and coverage. Telehealth (conducting therapy on the phone or via secure internet portal), is often not covered or requires special authorization.

**Missed Appointment Policy**

A therapy appointment is a promise between therapist and client. When I make an appointment with you, that time is reserved and no other client is able to use it. If you are unable to make it to an appointment, please give me as much notice as possible. My confidential voicemail is available 24 hours a day to leave messages. Please see the Counseling Service Agreement for more details. If you arrive later than 15 minutes for a scheduled appointment and do not call me, we will not be able to meet that day and it will be counted as a missed appointment.

Clients are allowed up to three (3) missed appointments without penalty during a calendar year. These sessions are prorated, based on the starting date of therapy. For clients starting January through April, 3 missed appointments are allowed. For clients starting May through August, 2 missed appointments are allowed. For clients starting September through December, 1 missed appointment is allowed. Any missed appointments after the allowed amount will result in a missed session fee, equal to the fee for the session.

**Electronics Policy**

Therapy is a time for focus and reflection. This is difficult to do when there are interruptions from electronic devices, even from the vibration of a phone. Please silence or turn off cell phones and other devices. If you are expecting a truly important call, let’s discuss it at the beginning of the session. ***Please note*** – I do not text. If you receive a text appointment reminder from the appointment reminder service, it is not from me. If you reply to it, I will not receive the text.

# Contact Information

My *voicemail* is confidential; no one else has access to it. You may leave a message there at any time, but please be aware that I may be unable to answer your call immediately. On Monday through Friday during business hours, I check my voicemail regularly and will return your call when I am able; on weekends I check voicemail at least once a day.

My *email* address may be used for non-urgent messages, but please remember that anything transmitted over the internet is *not confidential* and may even be stored on a computer somewhere else for years.

In a medical or psychiatric emergency, please call 911 for immediate assistance. You may also call the Contra Costa Crisis Center at 1-800-833-2900.

**Social Media Policy**

I maintain a Facebook account for business purposes. If clients request “friend” status on this account, I do accept. However, I do not respond to personal posts, pokes, messages, etc. This Facebook account exists to distribute information that is helpful to the general public or to people who want to know what is happening with my business. I do not accept friend requests from clients on my personal Facebook account.

# Codes of Ethics and Complaint Process

As a MFT licensed by the state of California, follow professional ethical standards set forth by three organizations which provide guidelines for therapist conduct. To learn more about these ethical standards, please visit the following links:

AAMFT Code of Ethics: <http://www.aamft.org/iMIS15/AAMFT/Content/Legal_Ethics/Code_of_Ethics.aspx>

CAMFT Ethical Standards: <http://www.camft.org/Content/NavigationMenu/AboutCAMFT/CodeofEthics/default.htm>

USABP Ethical Guidelines: <http://www.usabp.org/associations/1808/files/USABPethics.pdf>

Therapists in the State of California are governed by the Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS). When a therapist commits an illegal or unethical act, there is a complaint process for consumers. Please visit the following link for more information: <http://www.bbs.ca.gov/consumer/index.shtml>.

# About Therapy With Beverly

I offer professional and confidential psychotherapy, welcoming clients from all religions, ethnic backgrounds, cultures, and sexual orientations. As a therapist I see my role as one of a facilitator, providing an environment that is gentle and safe for exploration and discovery while incorporating the qualities of mindfulness, creativity, wholeness, spirituality, humor, resilience, and growth.

When I work with clients, I always keep in mind that ***you*** are the expert on you. If something I suggest feels uncomfortable or not a fit for you, please bring it up in session. You never have to say or do anything you do not want to.

**Your Rights Regarding Protected Health Information**

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| 1. | You have the right to request restrictions on certain uses and disclosures of protected health information about you, such as those necessary to carry out treatment, payment, or health care operations. Your therapist is not required to agree to your requested restriction. If the restriction is agreed upon, your therapist will maintain a written record of the agreed upon restriction. |
| 2. | You have the right to receive confidential communications of protected health information from your therapist by alternative means or at alternative locations. |
| 3. | You have the right to inspect and copy protected health information about you by making a specific request to do so in writing. This right to inspect and copy is not absolute – in other words, your therapist is permitted to deny access for specified reasons. For instance, you do not have this right of access with respect to the therapist’s “psychotherapy notes.” The term “psychotherapy notes” means notes recorded (in any medium) by a health care provider who is a mental health professional documenting or analyzing the contents of conversation during a private counseling session or a group, joint, or family counseling session and that are separated from the rest of the individual’s medical (includes mental health) record. The term excludes medication prescription and monitoring, counseling session start and stop times, the modalities and frequencies of treatment furnished, results of clinical tests, and any summary of the following items: diagnosis, functional status, the treatment plan, symptoms, prognosis, and progress to date. |
| 4. | You have the right to amend protected health information in the therapist’s records by making a request to do so in writing that provides a reason to support the requested amendment. This right to amend is not absolute – in other words, your therapist is permitted to deny the requested amendment for specified reasons. You also have the right, subject to limitations, to provide your therapist with a written addendum with respect to any item or statement in your records that you believe to be incorrect or incomplete and to have the addendum become a part of your record. |
| 5. | You have the right to receive an accounting from your therapist of the disclosures of protected health information made by him/her in the six years prior to the date on which the accounting is requested. As with other rights, this right is not absolute. In other words, your therapist is permitted to deny the request for specified reasons. For instance, he/she does not have to account for disclosures made in order to carry out his/her own treatment, payment, or health care operations. Your therapist also does not have to account for disclosures of protected health information that are made with your written authorization, since you have a right to receive a copy of any such authorization you might sign. |
| 6. | You have the right to obtain a paper copy of this notice from your therapist upon request. |
| PLEASE NOTE: In order to avoid confusion or misunderstanding, if you wish to exercise any of the rights enumerated above, please put your request in writing and deliver or send the writing to your therapist. If you wish to learn more detailed information about any of the above rights, or their limitations, please ask your therapist. She is willing to discuss any of these matters with you. | |