

Office Policies & Information, & Agreement for Psychotherapy Services

Welcome. This letter allows me the chance to go over important information about how I work, my policies, and what to expect (and not expect) from counseling. Please read it over and let me know if you have any questions or concerns.

Qualifications

I earned my Master of Social Work degree in 2009 from the University of Houston. Prior to this, in 2004, I began working as a volunteer with individuals who had experienced interpersonal and sexual violence. I enjoyed my work so much that I soon began doing much of the same direct services work as the staff. Later, as a graduate school intern, I began providing counseling services to women and men as well as co-leading two groups, one which combined yoga and talk therapy and another for incarcerated women. I work relationally, blending psychodynamic, attachment, and developmental perspectives. Because my focus is on trauma treatment, I often combine traditional talk therapy with newer, innovative approaches and techniques that are grounded in current trauma research.

Counseling Process Overview

In the first few counseling sessions, many important things will be happening. I will be learning about your struggles and concerns, and we will be getting a sense of each other's personalities and ways of relating while also trying to assess whether or not I can be of help to you. I do not work with clients to whom I believe I will be unable to be helpful. If this is the case, I will refer you to others who may work better with your particular concerns and issues. If, however, it feels like a good fit, then we can begin focusing on your concerns, how you hope counseling can help you, and my initial thoughts about treatment.

Depending on our time frame, your goals and treatment plan may shift over time as you work through issues and as I get to know you better. As you reach your goals and experience growth and movement in the direction you want to go, you may begin to wonder how long to remain in counseling. At this point, we can discuss if it might soon be time to end our work together or not. For some, it is helpful to take a break from the often difficult work of counseling, while others may wish to stay and work on other issues. In a broad sense, my hope is to help people get to a point where counseling is no longer needed on a regular basis, yet is always an option for extra help.

Terminating Therapy

There may be times when counseling becomes especially difficult, challenging, and painful and you may want to avoid attending your session or quit altogether. These times of intense feelings often precede important moments of growth and change. While you always have the choice to stop counseling, making this decision is meant, ideally, to be mutual. My preference is to end our work together in a satisfying and meaningful way over a reasonable number of sessions.

Dual Relationships

Dual relationships occur if there is a conflict of interest which interferes with my professional discretion, clinical judgment, or ability to provide ethical, impartial, and appropriate treatment or if any aspect of our relationship becomes exploitative or harmful to you. Living and working in a relatively rural area presents special challenges to our therapeutic relationship because the likelihood exists that we may both know or have some overlapping relationships. If, at any point during our work together, I become

aware of a dual relationship that could affect our work together, we will be obliged to discuss the impacts of this on our relationship. I will do my best to resolve the situation appropriately and ethically, which may result in us having to end our work together. If this happens, I will work with you to find other options for your treatment.

Benefits and Risks of Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy can sometimes be a difficult process that can elicit uncomfortable and intense feelings and thoughts. Depending on a variety of factors, counseling can bring about increased conflict in your close relationships and an increase in physical or mental health symptoms, such as insomnia, headaches, or feelings of anxiety or depression. You may also notice feeling more tired during your counseling process, particularly after intense sessions. Usually these changes are temporary as you are working to make the desired changes in your life. Sometimes change can be relatively quick, but often, especially with trauma treatment, it can be gradual and take a while. With your active involvement, willingness to make changes, and openness to the counseling process, the benefits to you, your relationships, and the quality of your life are numerous. It is not uncommon for people to experience improvement in their relationships, reduced feelings of depression and anxiety, and improved ability to deal with life's difficulties. While there are many ways counseling can help, there is never any guarantee it will yield positive or desired results.

Phone Calls, Email, Texting and Emergencies

If you need to call and leave me a message, you are welcome to do so. In general, during work hours, I am either in session with clients or attending to my self-care between sessions and am not able to answer my phone. However, I do check my messages and work hard to return calls as promptly as possible. When I take time off, I am often camping or backpacking, usually in areas without cell phone service. If I am planning on being out of town, I will leave an outgoing message so that you will know when I am able to return your call. If you are an ongoing client, I will let you know in advance when I am planning to take time off.

If you need to talk with me about therapeutic or clinical matters between sessions, you may call for a brief, emergency consultation. These usually last about 5 minutes or less and are normally free. Calls lasting longer than 5 minutes in a week or if you leave more than 5 minutes worth of phone messages in a week, you will be charged on a prorated basis for that time.

For brief matters, such as requesting or rescheduling an appointment, you may email me. I generally check email during normal work days and do not check email over the weekend. Please note, however, if I spend more than 5 minutes reading and responding to emails from you, you will be charged on a prorated basis. Email is not intended for emergencies or other urgent or time-sensitive matters. Email is also not intended for therapeutic or clinical material, and I ask that you refrain from including sensitive, confidential, or private information in any email communications with me. Email can be relatively easily accessed by unauthorized people, which can compromise the privacy and confidentiality of such communication.

Please do not use SMS (mobile phone text messaging) or messaging to contact me. I do not text or use any form of text messaging.

If you have an acute emergency and need to talk to someone right away, please contact an appropriate helping resource right away, such as a 24/7 hotline, calling 911, or contacting your local MHMR. For a listing of local mental health resources please visit the "Resources" section of my web site at www.amysugenocounseling.com

Cancellations and Lateness

When you make an appointment with me, that time is set aside specifically for you. At times, I may prepare information or materials ahead of time for your session. I also plan my work day around the times of my scheduled appointments. Filling appointment times on short notice can be very difficult and

affects my livelihood. Thus, **you will be charged in full for any appointments cancelled or rescheduled with less than 48 hours' notice.**

If you are running late for your appointment, please call to let me know you will be late. After 10 minutes past your scheduled appointment time, if I do not hear from you, I may assume you will not be attending your session. At this point, I reserve the right to cancel your session, and you will be charged in full. If you tend to forget appointments or often run late (more than a few minutes), I may not be the best fit for you. Please note that your session will still end at the scheduled end time, even if you are late arriving for your session.

Occasionally there may be circumstances beyond your control which may arise less than 48 hours from your scheduled appointment which prevent you from keeping your appointment. If such a circumstance arises and you are still able to keep your appointment via telephone, please call me as soon as possible so I can change my schedule accordingly. If you are unable to keep your appointment via telephone and must cancel, please contact me as soon as possible so I can open that time slot for someone else. If you cancel your appointment, it will be at my discretion as to whether or not you will be charged in full.

Therapist Time Off

An essential part of my work is making sure I'm taking good care of myself, both in and out of the office. I couldn't give you my best if I neglected this. Thus, I generally take time off every few months so that I can restore myself with rest, training and conferences, reading, and speaking. Sometimes I might be gone only for a few days, and sometimes a week or two. When I take time off, I am often camping, hiking, or backpacking, usually in areas without any cell phone or internet service. I will let you know in advance when I am planning to take time off. I will also work with you to minimize disruption to your counseling sessions as much as possible. If your situation requires a higher level of care such that these occasional disruptions would be harmful, I might not be the right fit for you.

Illness Policy

If you are not feeling well or suspect you might be getting sick, I ask that you contact me as soon as possible to cancel or reschedule your appointment, or discuss conducting your session by telephone. I will extend the same consideration to you if I am ill. Being able to stay healthy and well is vital to my livelihood and ability to provide consistent, attentive, and thoughtful care to my clients.

Fees

My fee for a 50-minute appointment at my office or at a nearby park (within 5 minutes of my office) is \$110. Fees for outdoor therapy sessions outside of Marble Falls are as follows: \$165 for a 75-min. session + mileage; \$220 for a 100-min. session + mileage; \$260 for a 2-hr. session + mileage. I use the standard state mileage reimbursement rate to calculate mileage cost. For most areas within 30 miles from my office, the rate will be around \$25. I reserve the right to increase my fees when appropriate. If I plan to do this, I will let you know as soon as possible and allow for plenty of time for the transition to higher fees.

Full payment is expected before or at the time of service. I do not extend credit or allow clients to carry a balance. Please note that unpaid charges will be turned over to a collection agency, which may compromise your confidentiality and can impact our therapeutic relationship.

Insurance

I do not currently take insurance. If you wish to file a claim with your insurance company, I am happy to provide you with a statement of services rendered.

Weekend Sessions

Occasionally, I am able to offer a very limited number of sessions on Sunday afternoons. An additional fee may apply for these sessions.

Confidentiality

With a few exceptions, all information that you discuss or disclose to me in your counseling session is confidential. Likewise, your identity and our relationship is confidential. This means if we see each other outside of your scheduled session, I will not acknowledge you, unless you first indicate you wish for me to do so. To greet, or otherwise acknowledge, you without your permission would be violating your confidentiality and privacy. This takes on particular importance in a rural area because the likelihood is high that we may eventually dine or shop at the same place and time.

An important part of professional growth and development of therapists is seeking professional and/or peer consultation as needed. In order to provide you with the best possible support and care, I may consult with other licensed mental health professionals. Not only is the consultation process itself confidential, but also your identity will remain anonymous. I will also change significant details in order to further protect your confidentiality.

Limits to confidentiality

Most exceptions to confidentiality are detailed in my Notice of Privacy Practices form. Exceptions to confidentiality, per Rule 781.211 of the Texas Administrative Code, include:

- ⌘ When there is a reasonable suspicion of abuse or neglect to a child under the age of 18, a disabled person, or an adult age 65 and over
- ⌘ When there is suspicion of abuse, neglect, and illegal, unprofessional, or unethical conduct in an in-patient mental health facility, a chemical dependency treatment facility or a hospital providing comprehensive medical rehabilitation services
- ⌘ When there has been sexual exploitation by a mental health services provider

If I am significantly concerned that a client or others are at imminent risk of physical injury, or that a client is in immediate risk of mental or emotional injury, I may take reasonable action to inform medical or law enforcement personnel.

Release of Information

Occasionally, there may be valid reasons to share limited information with others, such as your medical doctor, a previous therapist, or your psychiatrist. If you would like for me to coordinate your care with others, a written consent for release of information will need to be signed first.

Non-discrimination

It is my policy to not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national or ethnic origin, ancestry, age, religion or religious creed, disability or handicap, sex or gender, sexual orientation, gender identity and/or expression (including transgender identity), military or veteran status, genetic information, or any other characteristic protected under applicable federal, state, or local law. If there are aspects of your identity, beliefs, or anything about yourself that I am not familiar with, I welcome an open discussion. A sense of trust, respect, and safety are all essential to our work together, and I will work to accurately understand all aspects of who you are in order to provide you the best mental health care I can.

Complaints

If you have any concerns or complaints regarding any aspect of your treatment, please talk with me about it. I will listen with care and kindness and respond respectfully and professionally. If you believe, however, I have behaved unethically or unprofessionally, you can contact the Texas State Board of Social Worker Examiners at 1-800-942-5540.

Thank you for taking the time to read this document. If you have any questions or concerns, please make sure to let me know. I look forward to working with you.