

SERVICES AGREEMENT FOR COLLATERALS

INTRODUCTION

I want to thank you for accepting the invitation to assist in my client's psychotherapeutic treatment. This document is to inform you about the risks, rights and responsibilities of your participation as a collateral participant.

WHO IS COLLATERAL?

Collateral is usually a spouse, family member, or friend, who participates in therapy to assist the client or to discuss a shared issue. The collateral is not considered to be a client and is not the subject of the treatment. Psychotherapists have certain legal and ethical responsibilities to clients, and the privacy of the formal therapeutic relationship is given legal protection. My primary responsibility is to my client and I must place his or her (or their) interests first. You also have less privacy protection.

THE ROLE OF COLLATERALS IN THERAPY

The role of collateral will vary greatly. For example, collateral might attend only one session or may attend a number of the client's therapy sessions and his/her relationship with the client may be a focus of the treatment. If the client is an adult, the amount of your involvement in his or her (or their) therapy is at the discretion of the client. We will discuss your specific role in the treatment at our first meeting and other appropriate times.

BENEFITS AND RISKS

Psychotherapy can engender intense emotional experiences, and your participation may engender strong anxiety or emotional distress. It may also expose or create tension in your relationship with the client. While your participation can result in better understanding of the client or an improved relationship, or may even help in your own growth and development, there is no guarantee that this will be the case. Psychotherapy is a positive experience for many, but there are risks and it is not helpful to all people.

MEDICAL RECORDS

No record or chart will be maintained on you in your role as collateral. Notes about you may be entered into the client's chart. You have no right to access that chart without the written consent of the client.

FEES

As collateral you are not responsible for paying for my professional services unless you are financially responsible for the client.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Both federal and state law protects the confidentiality of information in the client's chart, including the information that you provide me. It can only be released if the client specifically authorizes me to do so. There are some exceptions to this general rule. The law mandates that a report be made where there is a reasonable suspicion of child, dependent or elder abuse or neglect. I may also be required to breach confidentiality if I believe a client presents a danger to self or to others. In addition, under certain circumstances, a court of law may subpoena clinical records.

If the client requests it, you are expected to respect the confidentiality of the information shared in your role as collateral.

DO COLLATERALS EVER BECOME A FORMAL CLIENT?

Collaterals may discuss personal problems in therapy, especially problems that interact with issues of the client. The therapist may recommend therapy for a collateral. In most cases, you would be referred to another professional for treatment. There are two main reasons for referring to another professional:

- Seeing two members of the same family, or close friends, may result in a dual role, and potentially cloud the therapist's judgment. Making a referral helps prevent this from happening.
- The therapist must keep a focus on the original primary task of treatment for the original client. A referral for collaterals helps the therapist to stay focused.

RELEASE OF INFORMATION

The client is not required to sign an authorization to release information to the collateral when the client has requested that collateral participate in therapy. However, it is my practice to not disclose any confidential information to the collateral other than as is relevant and important to do so in the session. In most instances, the therapist cannot take a call from collateral about the client without an Authorization to Release Information Form.

PARENTS AS COLLATERALS

Therapists specializing in the treatment of minor children have long recognized the need to treat children in the context of their family. Participation of parents, siblings, and sometimes extended family members, is common and often recommended. Parents of minor children have more rights and responsibilities in their role as collateral than in other treatment situations where the client is not a minor.

- In treatment involving children and their parents, access to information is an important and sometimes contentious topic. Particularly for older children, trust and privacy are crucial to treatment success. But parents also need to know certain information about the treatment. For this reason, we need to discuss and agree about what information will be shared and what information will remain private. I generally require a written contract signed by both you and your child/children concerning access to a child's record and once that contract is made, I will treat it as legally binding, although it sometimes may be overridden by a judge. In general, I believe that parents should be informed about the goals of treatment and how the treatment is going and whether the child comes to his/her appointments. I will always inform you if I think that your child is in danger or if he/she is endangering others. One of our first tasks is to discuss and agree on our shared definition of dangerousness so we are all clear about what will be disclosed.
- If you are participating in therapy with your child, you should expect the therapist to request that you examine your own attitudes and behaviors to determine if you can make positive changes that will be of benefit to your child.

SUMMARY

If you have questions about therapy, my procedures, or your role in this process, please discuss them with me. Remember that the best way to assure quality and ethical treatment is to keep communication open and direct with your therapist. By signing below you indicate that you have read and understood this document.

Signature

Date