



Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC

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## OFFICE POLICIES AND GENERAL INFORMATION AGREEMENT FOR PSYCHOTHERAPY SERVICES

*This form provides you (patient) with information that is additional to that detailed in the notice of privacy practices and it is subject to HIPAA preemptive analysis.*

### **Confidentiality**

All information disclosed within sessions and the written records pertaining to those sessions are confidential and may not be revealed to anyone without your (client's) written permission, except where disclosure is required by law. Most of the provisions explaining when the law requires disclosure were described to you in the notice of privacy practices that you received with this form.

### **When disclosure is required by law**

Some of the circumstances where disclosure is required by the law are: where there is a reasonable suspicion of child, dependent, or elder abuse or neglect; and where a client presents a danger to self, to others, to property, or is gravely disabled (for more details see also notice of privacy practices form).

### **When disclosure may be required**

Disclosure may be required pursuant to a legal proceeding. If you place your mental status at issue in litigation initiated by you, the defendant may have the right to obtain a psychotherapy summary and/or testimony by Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC at his discretion unless mandated by a court of law. Psychotherapy notes are excluded from the right to examine and obtain records under HIPAA Law. In couple and family therapy, or when different family members are seen individually, confidentiality and privilege do not apply between the couple or among family members. Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC will use clinical judgment when revealing such information. Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC will not release records to any outside party unless so authorized to do so by **all** adult family members who were part of the treatment.

### **Emergencies**

If there is an emergency during our work together, or in the future after termination, where **Blue Ridge Counseling, LLC** becomes concerned about your personal safety, the possibility of you injuring someone else, or about you receiving proper counseling, Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC will do whatever he can within the limits of the law to prevent you from injuring yourself or others and to ensure that you receive the proper medical care. For this purpose, Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC may contact the police, hospital, or the person whose name you have provided on the biographical sheet and have provided a signed Release of Information. A Release of Information is not required when it is necessary to contact emergency personnel or hospital to ensure your safety.

## **Health Insurance and Confidentiality of Records**

Disclosure of confidential information may be required by your health insurance carrier or HMO/PPO/MCO/EAP in order to process the claims. *Blue Ridge Counseling, LLC* will only release the minimum necessary information to the carrier. Unless authorized by you explicitly, the psychotherapy notes will not be disclosed to your insurance carrier. *Blue Ridge Counseling, LLC* has no control or knowledge over what insurance companies do with the information he submits or who has access to this information. You must be aware that submitting a mental health invoice for reimbursement carries a certain amount of risk to confidentiality, privacy, or to future eligibility to obtain health or life insurance. The risk stems from the fact that mental health information is entered into insurance companies' computers and soon will also be reported to the Congress-approved National Medical Data Bank. Accessibility to companies' computers or to the National Medical Data Bank database is always in question, as computers are inherently vulnerable to break-ins and unauthorized access. Medical data have been reported to have been sold, stolen, or accessed by enforcement agencies; therefore, you are in a vulnerable position.

## **Confidentiality of e-mail, cell phone, and fax communication**

It is very important to be aware that e-mail and cell phone (also cordless phones) communication can be relatively easily accessed by unauthorized people and, hence, the privacy and confidentiality of such communication can be easily compromised. E-mails, in particular, are vulnerable to such unauthorized access due to the fact that servers have unlimited and direct access to all e-mails that go through them. Faxes can be sent erroneously to the wrong address. Please notify Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC at the beginning of treatment if you decide to avoid or limit in any way the use of any or all of the above-mentioned communication devices. Please do not use e-mail or faxes in emergency situations.

## **Litigation Limitation**

Due to the nature of the therapeutic process and the fact that it often involves making a full disclosure with regard to many matters that may be of a confidential nature, it is agreed that should there be legal proceedings (such as, but not limited to, **divorce and custody disputes**, injuries, lawsuits, etc.), neither you (client) nor your attorney, nor anyone else acting on your behalf will file suit against *Blue Ridge Counseling, LLC* due to the content of legally required testimony in court or at any other proceeding.

## **Consultation**

Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC consults regularly with other professionals regarding his clients; however, the client's name or other identifying information is never mentioned. The client's identity remains completely anonymous, and confidentiality is fully maintained.

Considering all of the above exclusions, if it is still appropriate, upon your request, *Blue Ridge Counseling, LLC* will release information to any agency/person you specify unless Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC concludes that releasing such information might be harmful in any way.

## **Telephone and emergency procedures**

If you need to contact Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC between sessions, please leave a message at **(706) 974-3899** and your call will be returned as soon as possible. Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC checks his/her messages a few times a day (but never during the nighttime), unless s/he is out of town. Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC checks the messages less frequently on weekends and holidays. If an emergency situation arises, please indicate it clearly in your

message. If you need to talk to someone right away, you can call Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC at (706) 974-3899, emergency services (911), or the Georgia Crisis Access Line, (800) 715-4225.

### **Payments and insurance reimbursement**

Clients are expected to pay the standard fee of \$85.00 per 55-minute session at the end of each session or at the end of the month unless other arrangements have been made. Telephone conversations, site visits, report writing and reading, consultation with other professionals, release of information, reading records, longer sessions, travel time, and so forth, will be charged at the same rate, unless indicated and agreed otherwise. *Blue Ridge Counseling, LLC* can file insurance for you if desired as long as Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC is listed as a provider. In the event Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC is not listed as a provider under your insurance plan, *Blue Ridge Counseling, LLC* can provide documentation to help you receive reimbursement; however, *Blue Ridge Counseling, LLC* will not be held liable for claims that are not accepted by your insurance plan. Clients are expected to verify coverage prior to engaging in counseling with *Blue Ridge Counseling, LLC*. Please notify Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC if any problem arises during the course of therapy regarding your ability to make timely payments. As was indicated in the section "Health Insurance and Confidentiality of Records," you must be aware that submitting a mental health invoice for reimbursement carries a certain amount of risk. Not all issues/conditions/problems that are the focus of psychotherapy are reimbursed by insurance companies. It is your responsibility to verify the specifics of your coverage.

### **Mediation and arbitration**

All disputes arising out of or in relation to this agreement to provide psychotherapy services shall first be referred to mediation before, and as a precondition of, the initiation of arbitration. The mediator shall be a neutral third party chosen by agreement of *Blue Ridge Counseling, LLC* and client(s). The cost of such mediation, if any, shall be split equally, unless otherwise agreed. In the event that mediation is unsuccessful, any unresolved controversy related to this agreement should be submitted to and settled by binding arbitration in Dawson County, Georgia in accordance with the rules of the American Arbitration Association that are in effect at the time the demand for arbitration is filed. Notwithstanding the foregoing, in the event that your account is overdue (unpaid) and there is no agreement on a payment plan, *Blue Ridge Counseling, LLC* can use legal means (court, collection agency, etc.) to obtain payment. The prevailing party in arbitration or collection proceedings shall be entitled to recover a reasonable sum for attorneys' fees. In the case of arbitration, the arbitrator will determine that sum.

### **The process of therapy/evaluation**

Participation in therapy can result in a number of benefits to you, including improving interpersonal relationships and resolution of the specific concerns that led you to seek therapy. Working toward these benefits, however, requires effort on your part. Psychotherapy requires your very active involvement, honesty, and openness in order to change your thoughts, feelings, and/or behavior. Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC will ask for your feedback and views on your therapy, its progress, and other aspects of the therapy and will expect you to respond openly and honestly. Sometimes more than one approach can be helpful in dealing with a certain situation. During evaluation or therapy, remembering or talking about unpleasant events, feelings, or thoughts can result in your experiencing considerable discomfort or strong feelings of anger, sadness, worry, fear, and so forth, or experiencing anxiety, depression, insomnia, and so forth. Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC may challenge some of your assumptions or perceptions or propose different ways of looking at, thinking about, or handling situations that can cause you to feel very upset, angry, depressed, challenged, or disappointed. Attempting to resolve issues that brought you to therapy in the first

place, such as personal or interpersonal relationships, may result in changes that were not originally intended. Psychotherapy may result in decisions about changing behaviors, employment, substance use, schooling, housing, or relationships. Sometimes a decision that is positive for one family member is viewed quite negatively by another family member. Change will sometimes be easy and swift, but more often it will be slow and even frustrating. There is no guarantee that psychotherapy will yield positive or intended results. During the course of therapy, Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC is likely to draw on various psychological approaches according, in part, to the problem that is being treated and his/her assessment of what will best benefit you. These approaches include Behavioral Therapy, Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT), Family Systems, or Psychoeducation.

### **Discussion of treatment plan**

Within a reasonable period of time after the initiation of treatment, Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC will discuss with you (client) his working understanding of the problem, treatment plan, therapeutic objectives, and view of the possible outcomes of treatment. If you have any unanswered questions about any of the procedures used in the course of your therapy, their possible risks, Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC's expertise in employing them, or about the treatment plan, please ask and you will be answered fully. You also have the right to ask about other treatments for your condition and their risks and benefits. If you could benefit from any treatment that Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC does not provide, he has an ethical obligation to assist you in obtaining those treatments.

### **Termination**

As set forth above, after the first couple of meetings, Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC will assess if he can be of benefit to you. Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC does not accept clients who, in his opinion, he cannot help. In such a case, s/he will give you a number of referrals that you can contact. If at any point during psychotherapy, Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC assesses that s/he is not effective in helping you reach the therapeutic goals, s/he is obliged to discuss it with you and, if appropriate, to terminate treatment. In such a case, s/he would give you a number of referrals that may be of help to you. If you request it and authorize it in writing, Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC will talk to the psychotherapist of your choice in order to help with the transition. If at any time you want another professional's opinion or wish to consult with another therapist, Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC will assist you in finding someone qualified, and, if he has your written consent, he will provide her or him with the essential information needed. You have the right to terminate therapy at any time. If you choose to do so, Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC will offer to provide you with names of other qualified professionals whose services you might prefer.

### **Dual relationships**

Not all dual relationships are unethical or avoidable. Therapy never involves sexual or any other dual relationship that impairs Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC's objectivity, clinical judgment, or therapeutic effectiveness or can be exploitative in nature. Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC will assess carefully before entering into nonsexual and nonexploitative dual relationships with clients. Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC will never acknowledge working therapeutically with anyone without his/her written permission. Many clients choose Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC as their therapist because they know him before they enter into therapy with him and/or are aware of his stance on the topic. Nevertheless, Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC will discuss with you, his client(s), the often-existing complexities, potential benefits, and difficulties that may be involved in such relationships. Dual or multiple relationships can enhance therapeutic effectiveness but can also detract from it and often it is impossible to know that ahead of time. It is your, the client's, responsibility to communicate to Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC if the dual relationship becomes uncomfortable for you in any way. Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC will always listen carefully and respond accordingly to

your feedback. Joe Stapp, MA, LPC, NCC will discontinue the dual relationship if he finds it interfering with the effectiveness of the therapeutic process or the welfare of the client and, of course, you can do the same at any time.

**Cancellation**

Since scheduling of an appointment involves the reservation of time specifically for you, please provide a notice you need to reschedule the appointment at least 24 hours in advance. Unless we reach a different agreement, the full fee will be charged for sessions missed without any prior notification. *Blue Ridge Counseling, LLC* understands there are moments where notification is not possible. In these circumstances, exceptions can be made, but is up to the discretion of *Blue Ridge Counseling, LLC*. Most insurance companies do not reimburse for missed sessions.

Should *Blue Ridge Counseling, LLC* cancel an appointment, notification will be given as soon as possible. In this circumstance, neither the client nor *Blue Ridge Counseling, LLC* will be held responsible for reimbursement.

**I have read the above agreement and office policies and general information carefully. I understand them and agree to comply with them:**

Patient Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Guardian Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Therapist Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Signature: \_\_\_\_\_