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## LETTER OF AGREEMENT FOR COUPLES COUNSELING

Welcome. I hope your time here is worthwhile. I am giving the two of you a copy of this letter to help answer questions that you may have about couples counseling. Please go over this letter carefully and discuss it with one another. Then feel free to ask me any questions you may have. Either or both of you are welcome to show this letter to others in your family or to other professionals that you trust.

At the end of this letter is a place for you to sign your names. Doing so, means that you have read and understood all the points in this letter. On a separate form, you will be invited to write down the goals you hope to accomplish together. We can review these goals as we go along. We can change them anytime we want if, together, it seems like a good idea.

OUR SENSE OF WELL-BEING is affected by many factors. You are here to address non-medical factors. If you have not had a recent physical exam I recommend that you arrange for one as soon as possible. This is important because we want to make sure that none of the problems we discuss are the result of physical health difficulties. Since I am not a physician, I cannot know if you have a physical condition(s) that might be related to our work. Please let me know about any health problems you have.

EACH OF OUR APPOINTMENTS is scheduled to last 50 minutes. I am usually very prompt. If I'm ever late, I'll try to let one of you know in advance, even if the delay is just a few minutes. If I cause a late start and you can stay longer, I will still see you for the entire session. If you arrive late for an appointment, we may still need to end the meeting 50 minutes after it was scheduled to begin. Cancellations less than 48 hours (unless there are extenuating circumstances such as illness or unsafe driving conditions) or missed appointments, will be charged for at a rate of \$70.00 (I cannot bill your insurance company for a missed session.). You will not be charged for a session if you let me know at least 48 hours in advance.

BETWEEN MEETINGS I can be reached during work hours through my voice mailbox at 508-277-8770. You can also text me to that same number. If am unavailable someone will be on call for me. I may also talk with you about some emergency numbers you can call if you feel you are in crisis. When compared with other forms of seeking help, couples counseling is fairly non-intensive in that meetings usually occur only once a week. If either of you feel that this is not enough for you at this time, we can discuss alternatives that provide increased support.

HOW MANY SESSIONS WILL WE BE ATTENDING? is a question you may be thinking about. At the beginning of therapy we can choose how many sessions you want to meet for. If you prefer, we can keep it more open-ended. In the latter case, *if one or both of you choose to stop sessions, it is very important that all of us discuss this during at least one session.* Achieving clarity about the reasons for discontinuing, talking about what the experience was like for both of you, and making plans are important steps. We might decide to stop because your goals have been reached. Or we might decide that all of your goals will not be reached at this time. You are free to resume sessions with me in the future if/when there are openings in my practice.

THE FEE for couples counseling is 140.00 per 50 minute session. For those of you with managed care insurance, the fee has been decided by a contract between myself and your insurance company. You will probably have a co-payment. For those of you without insurance coverage, I offer a *sliding scale* based on financial need. You may pay by cash or check. You will get a receipt. There will be a \$25.00 fee for returned checks. If a check is returned a second time, you will be asked to pay the balance you owe in cash or by money order.

Please let me know if there is any change in your insurance policy. If there is a change or loss of coverage and you do not tell me, or if your insurance company goes out of business or refuses to pay a

valid claim, you will become responsible for the insurance balance.

ETHICS AND CONFIDENTIALITY are essential to the success of psychotherapy/counseling. With a few exceptions everything we discuss is kept in strict confidence. Normally, information about our sessions is released only upon written permission from you. There is a special form for this that requires both our signatures.

*Massachusetts law requires or allows confidentiality to be overturned even when a release is not signed when: 1) Someone is at risk for suicidal or homicidal behavior; 2) When it is suspected or known that a child or elder person is being abused or neglected; 3) When the person receiving services or the legal guardian responsible for payment refuses to pay for services rendered; 4) When a judge court orders information from a patient's file; 5) When billing your insurance company or requesting additional sessions. 6) You will also be given a copy of the HIPPA act which went into effect in April 2003. It explains privacy and confidentiality in more detail.*

ADDITIONAL GUIDELINES UNIQUE TO COUPLES COUNSELING are essential to ensure that a healthy therapeutic environment is established and maintained. My obligation is to be impartial. **Therefore, anything that either of you tells me without your partner present may be disclosed to your partner.** I am under no obligation to withhold from your partner any information disclosed to me by you. To do so could be detrimental to our work together.

Couples counseling is usually ineffective if there is physical abuse in your relationship. If this is the case, please let me know and we will discuss other forms of help that should precede couples counseling. If either or both of you have a problem with chemical addictions, couples counseling will probably not be effective until this problem is addressed directly. Once again, please let me know if you have a current problem with substance abuse and we will discuss what other forms of help should be sought concurrently or before couples counseling.

Separation may or may not be an issue. Couples come to counseling for a variety of reasons. Communication may have broken down and their relationship may be in trouble. Or their relationship may be on solid ground but with an impasse in a specific area that is affecting the rest of the relationship. Couples counseling works best when the couple make a firm commitment to stay with one another ("**no exits**") during the time they are in counseling. There are many types of "exits", which we will discuss.

BY SIGNING BELOW you acknowledge that you have read this communication or have had it read to you and that you have received a copy of it. You further acknowledge your right to ask questions if you do not understand this communication. I see couple's counseling as an effort by both therapist and couples to work toward improving the quality of *each participant's life and your life together*. I look forward to working with both of you.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Client Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Client Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Therapist Signature \_\_\_\_\_  
Date