

Stafford Community Counseling, LLC  
Laurie Barton, LPC  
29 Sassafras Lane  
Stafford, VA. 22554

## **Office Policies & General Information Agreement for Psychotherapy Services or Informed Consent for Psychotherapy**

*This form provides you, the client, 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 written permission except where disclosure is required by law.

**WHEN DISCLOSURE IS REQUIRED OR MAY BE REQUIRED BY LAW:** Some of the circumstances where disclosure is required or may be required by law are: where there is a reasonable suspicion of child, dependent, or elder abuse or neglect; where a client presents a danger to self, to others, to property, or is gravely disabled; or when a client's family members communicate to Laurie Barton that the client presents a danger to others. Disclosure may also be required pursuant to a legal proceeding by or against you. If you place your mental status at issue in litigation initiated by you, the defendant may have the right to obtain the psychotherapy records and/or testimony by Laurie Barton. While I will do my best to seek your authorization to release the requested information regarding our psychotherapy from you first, in some situations a judge can order the release of the records of your psychotherapy with me or may order me to testify in regard to our therapeutic work.

**EMERGENCY:** If there is an emergency during therapy, or in the future after termination, where Laurie Barton becomes concerned about your personal safety, the possibility of you injuring someone else, or about you receiving proper psychiatric care, she will do whatever she 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, she may also contact the person whose name you have provided on the biographical sheet.

**HEALTH INSURANCE & CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS:** Disclosure of confidential information may be required by your health insurance carrier or HMO/PPO/MCO/EAP in order to process claims. Laurie Barton has no control over, or knowledge of, what insurance companies do with the 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 capacity to obtain health or life insurance or even a job. The risk stems from the fact that mental health information is likely to be entered into big insurance companies' computers and may be reported to the 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 hacking and unauthorized access. Medical data has also been reported to have been legally accessed by law enforcement and other agencies, which also puts you in a vulnerable position.

**LITIGATION:** Sometimes patients become involved in litigation while they are in therapy or after therapy has been completed. Sometimes patients (or the opposing attorney, in a legal case) want the records disclosed to the legal system. Due to the nature of the psychotherapeutic process and the fact that it often involves making a full disclosure with regard to many matters, clients' records are generally confidential and private in nature. Patients should know that very serious consequences can result from disclosing therapy records to the legal system. Such disclosures may negatively affect the outcome of custody disputes or other legal matters and may negatively affect the therapeutic relationship. If you or the opposing attorney are considering requesting Laurie Barton's disclosure of the records, Laurie Barton will do her best to discuss with you the risks and benefits of doing so. As noted in this document, you have the right to review your own psychotherapy records anytime. (See also relevant section above: "WHEN DISCLOSURE IS REQUIRED OR MAY BE REQUIRED BY LAW")

**CONSULTATION:** Laurie Barton consults regularly with other professionals regarding her clients; however, each client's identity remains completely anonymous and confidentiality is fully maintained.

## **E-MAILS, CELL PHONES, TEXTS, COMPUTERS, AND FAXES:**

Computers and unencrypted e-mail, texts, and e-faxes communication can be relatively easily accessed by unauthorized people and therefore can compromise the privacy and confidentiality of the information used in such communications. Servers and telecommunication companies often have direct and unlimited access to all the information contained in the e-mails, texts and e-faxes that use their services. To protect the confidential information of clients, Laurie Barton's computer has a firewall, the latest virus protection software and a password. Laurie Barton also backs up all client related information on a regular basis onto an encrypted hard-drive. When you communicate with Laurie Barton using unencrypted e-mail, texts or e-fax or via phone messages, you assume the responsibility of the risk that your information and identity may be intercepted. If you choose to communicate with Laurie Barton using e-mail or SMS/text messaging, you are advised to use personal email and SMS/MMS addresses rather than those associated you're your work accounts. Please do not use texts, e-mail, voice mail, or faxes for emergencies as they will not be accessed in a timely manner.

**RECORDS AND YOUR RIGHT TO REVIEW THEM:** Both the law and the standards of Laurie Barton\_profession require that she keep treatment records for at least 5 years. Please note that clinically relevant information from emails, texts, and faxes are part of the clinical records. Unless otherwise agreed to be necessary, Laurie Barton retains clinical records only as long as is mandated by Virginia law. If you have concerns regarding the treatment records, please discuss them with Laurie Barton. As a client, you have the right to review or receive a summary of your records at any time, except in limited legal or emergency circumstances or when Laurie Barton assesses that releasing such information might be harmful in any way. In such a case, Laurie Barton will provide the records to an appropriate and legitimate mental health professional of your choice. Considering all of the above exclusions, if it is still appropriate, and upon your request, Laurie Barton will release information to any agency/person you specify

unless Laurie Barton assesses that releasing such information might be harmful in any way

**TELEPHONE & EMERGENCY PROCEDURES:** If you need to contact Laurie Barton between sessions, please leave a message at the answering service (540) 226-1498 and your call will be returned as soon as possible. Laurie Barton checks her messages a few times during the daytime only, unless she is out of town. If an emergency situation arises, indicate it clearly in your message and if you need to talk to someone right away call Psychiatric Emergency Services, (540) 741-373-6876 or the Police: 911. Please do not use email or faxes for emergencies. Laurie Barton does not always check her email or faxes daily.

**PAYMENTS & INSURANCE REIMBURSEMENT:** Clients are expected to pay the standard fee of \$125.00 per 50 minute session at the end of each session. Payments may be made in cash, check or credit card at the time of service. I do not accept insurance. However, upon request, I will provide you with a Superbill that you can submit for possible insurance or Flex Spending reimbursement. There is no guarantee of reimbursement, it is best to check with your carrier to determine your coverage. As was indicated in the section, *Health Insurance & 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, which are dealt with in psychotherapy, are reimbursed by insurance companies. It is your responsibility to verify the specifics of your coverage. If your account is overdue (unpaid) and there is no written agreement on a payment plan, Laurie Barton can use legal or other means (courts, collection agencies, etc.) to obtain payment.

**THE PROCESS OF THERAPY/EVALUATION AND SCOPE OF PRACTICE:**

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. Laurie Barton 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 you experiencing considerable discomfort or strong feelings of anger, sadness, worry, fear, etc., or experiencing anxiety, depression, insomnia, etc. Laurie Barton may challenge some of your assumptions or perceptions or propose different ways of looking at, thinking about, or handling situations, which 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, Laurie Barton 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, but are not limited to, behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, cognitive, psychodynamic, existential, system/family, developmental (adult, child, family), humanistic or psycho-educational. Laurie Barton **provides neither custody evaluation recommendation** nor medication or prescription recommendation nor legal advice, as these activities do not fall within his/her scope of practice.

**TREATMENT PLANS:** Within a reasonable period of time after the initiation of treatment, Laurie Barton will discuss with you his/her working understanding of the problem, treatment plan, therapeutic objectives, and his/her 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, Laurie Barton'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.

**TERMINATION:** As set forth above, after the first couple of meetings, Laurie Barton will assess if she can be of benefit to you. Laurie Barton does not work with clients who, in her opinion, she cannot help. In such a case, if appropriate, she will give you referrals that you can contact. If at any point during psychotherapy Laurie Barton either assesses that she is not effective in helping you reach the therapeutic goals or perceived you as non-compliant or non-responsive, and if you are available and/or it is possible and appropriate to do, she will discuss with you the termination of treatment and conduct pre-termination counseling. In such a case, if appropriate and/or necessary, she would give you a couple of referrals that may be of help to you. If you request it and authorize it in writing, Laurie Barton 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, Laurie Barton will give you a couple of referrals that you may want to contact, 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 and communication at any time. If you choose to do so, upon your request and if appropriate and possible, Laurie Barton will provide you with names of other qualified professionals whose services you might prefer.

## **Minors in Therapy**

If you are under eighteen years of age, please be aware that the law may give your parents or guardians the right to obtain information about your treatment and/or examine your treatment records. It is my policy to request a written agreement from your parents or guardians indicating that they consent to give up access to such

information and/or, to your records. If they agree, I will provide them only with general information about our work together subject to your approval, or, if I feel it is important for them to know in order to make sure that you and people around you are safe. If I think it is appropriate, I will involve them if I feel that there is a high risk that you will seriously harm yourself or another/others. Before giving them any verbal or written information, I will discuss the matter with you, if possible. I will do the best I can to resolve any differences that you and I may have about what I am prepared to discuss.

**INTERNET SEARCHES:** In principle, Laurie Barton does not use search engines to look up information about clients. In extreme situations that involve the wellbeing and safety of the client, such as when Laurie Barton has reasons to suspect that the client might be in a crisis or if the client has not shown up to sessions nor communicated about it, exceptions might be made. In these cases, searching the internet for pertinent information about the client or attempting to find alternative ways to contact the client might be necessary to ensure their welfare. These extraordinary incidents would be fully documented and discussed with the client when possible.

**SOCIAL MEDIA POLICY:** Laurie Barton takes issues of confidentiality and privacy, as well as healthy boundaries relating to the therapeutic relationship, very seriously. In order to protect the right of client and therapist for privacy, in order to safeguard the confidentiality of information shared between them, and in order to avoid confusion and maintain clear boundaries between client and therapist, Laurie Barton has chosen to follow these principles concerning the use of social media:

- Laurie Barton does not engage with clients in any way on social networking sites. For example, friend requests on Facebook will be denied and any communication on social platforms such as Messenger, will be ignored.
- The preferred method to contact Laurie Barton between sessions is the phone. This is especially true when a client wishes to discuss therapeutic related issues.

- For brief pragmatic communications, such as rescheduling a session, clients may also use email. To protect your information, please avoid using email to communicate matters related to the sessions.

## **Policy for Court Appearances**

Because court appearances require a block of time out of my office, it requires me to reschedule other clients to leave the time available for you. To accommodate this, I have found it necessary to establish the following policy.

Court generally requires a minimum of two hours out of the office (travel—court time—travel back to the office). If you desire me to be available for court, the initial deposit is \$500. This payment is refundable only when the court proceedings are cancelled or resolved more than 48 hours prior to the court time. Regrettably, even if the matter gets settled on that day or the day before, it is too late for me to be able to reschedule those hours with other clients. If the court proceeding takes more than two hours, I'll expect to be reimbursed at the rate of \$500 per hour for any hour or part of an hour that I'm needed.

**AUDIO OR VIDEO RECORDING:** Unless otherwise agreed to by all parties beforehand, there shall be no audio or video recording of therapy sessions, phone calls, or any other services provided by Laurie Barton

## **Complaints**

If you are unhappy with what's happening in therapy, I hope you will talk about it with me so that I can respond to your concerns. I will take such criticism seriously, and with care and respect. If you believe that I've been unwilling to listen and respond, or that I have behaved unethically, you can complain about my behavior to the Virginia Board of Counseling, 9960 Maryland Drive, Suite 300, Henrico, Virginia 23233- 1463.

**CANCELLATION:** Since the scheduling of an appointment involves the reservation of time specifically for you, a minimum of 48 hours (2 days) notice is required for re-scheduling or canceling an appointment. Unless we reach a different agreement, the full fee will be charged for sessions missed without such notification. Most insurance companies do not reimburse for missed sessions.

I have read the above Office Policies and General Information, Agreement for Psychotherapy Services or Informed Consent for Psychotherapy carefully (a total of 7 pages); I understand them and agree to comply with them:

**Client's Name (print)** \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Psychotherapist's Name (print)**

\_\_\_\_\_

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