**Abigail Blackburn, Psy.D.**

**233 Needham Street**

**Third Floor**

**Newton, MA 02464**

**Outpatient Services Contract**

Welcome to my practice. This document contains important information about my professional services and business policies. Please read it carefully and jot down any questions you might have so that we can discuss them at our next meeting. When you sign this document, it will represent an agreement between us.

**Psychological Services**

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general standards. It varies depending upon the personalities of the psychologist and the patient and the particular problems you bring forward. There are many different methods I may use to deal with the problems that you hope to address. Psychotherapy is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, it calls for a very active effort on your part. In order for the therapy to be most successful, you will have to work on things we talk about in sessions and at home.

Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness and helplessness. On the other hand, psychotherapy has also been shown to have benefits for people who go through it. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems and significant reductions in feelings of distress. But there are no guarantees of what you will experience.

Our first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, I will be able to offer you some first impressions of what our work will include and a treatment plan to follow, if you decide to continue with therapy. You should evaluate this information along with your own opinions of whether you feel comfortable working with me. Therapy involves a large commitment of time, money and energy, so you should be very careful about the therapist you select. If you have questions about my procedures, we should discuss them whenever they arise. If your doubts persist, I will be happy to help you set up another meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.

**Meetings**

I normally conduct an evaluation that will last 2 to 4 sessions. During this time we can both decide if I am the best person to provide the services you need in order to meet your treatment goals. If psychotherapy is begun, I will usually schedule one 45 minute session (one appointment hour of 45 minutes) per week at a time we agree on, although some we may decide together it is necessary to meet more frequently. Once an appointment hour is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide 24 hours advance notice of cancellation.

**Professional Fees**

My hourly fee for intake appointments is $250.00. My hourly fee for psychotherapy is $190.00. In addition to weekly appointments, I charge this amount for other professional services you may need, although I will break down the hourly cost if I work for periods of less than one hour. Other services include report writing, telephone conversations lasting longer than 20 minutes, attendance at meetings with other professionals you have authorized, preparation of records or treatment summaries and the time spent performing any other service you may request of me. If you become involved in legal proceedings that require my participation, you will be expected to pay for my professional time even if I am called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement, I charge $700.00 per hour for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding.

**Billing and Payments**

You will be expected to pay for the first session at the time it is held. If you have BCBS insurance coverage, you will be expected to pay the required co-pay at the time of the appointment. If you have a deductible, you will be expected to pay the covered amount when BCBS notifies me of your responsibility for the appointment. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to when they are requested. In circumstances of unusual financial hardship, I may be willing to negotiate a fee adjustment or payment installment plan. In the event you are paying a reduced fee, you may be asked to move your appointment time to a “lower volume” time in order to accommodate my schedule if you are currently seen at a “high volume” time.

For clients who are self-pay, you are free to submit claims to your insurance company. Please be aware I do not become involved in this process. Even if you submit the claims yourself, you may not be reimbursed for my services. Please be aware of the parameters of your particular contract.

If your account has not been paid for more than sixty days and arrangements for payment have not been agreed upon, I have the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may involve hiring a collection agency or going through small claims court. If such legal action is necessary, its costs will be included in the claim. In most collection situations, the only information I release regarding a patient’s treatment is his/her name, the nature of services provided and the amount due.

**Insurance Reimbursement**

In order for us to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate what resources you have available to pay for your treatment. If you have a health insurance policy, it will usually provide some coverage for mental health treatment. I will fill out forms and provide you with whatever assistance I can in helping you receive the benefits to which you are entitled; however you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of my fees. It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

I contract only with Blue Cross Blue Shield plans. You should read carefully the section in your insurance coverage booklet that describes mental health services. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. Of course I will provide you with whatever information I can based on my experience and will be happy to help you in understanding the information you receive from your insurance company. If it is necessary to clear confusion, I will be willing to call the company on your behalf.

Due to the rising costs of health care, insurance benefits have increasingly become more complex. It is sometimes difficult to determine exactly how much mental health coverage is available. “Managed health care” plans such as HMOs and PPOs often require authorization before they provide reimbursement for mental health services. These plans are often limited to short-term treatment approaches designed to work out specific problems that interfere with a person’s usual level of functioning. It may be necessary to seek approval for more therapy after a certain number of sessions. While a lot can be accomplished in short-term therapy, some patients feel that they need more services after insurance benefits run end. At that time, the fee for services moves from the Blue Cross Blue Shield rate per session to my hourly rate of $190.00. In cases of extreme financial hardship, I may be willing to negotiate a fee adjustment or payment plan. If a reduced fee is arranged, you may be asked to move your appointment time to a “low volume” hour in order to accommodate my schedule if you are currently at a “high volume” time slot.

You should also be aware that most insurance companies require you to authorize me to provide them with a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes I have to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of the entire record (in rare cases). This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored in a computer. Though all insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, I have no control over what they do with it once it is in their hands. In some cases, they may share the information with a national medical information databank. I will provide you with a copy of any report I submit, if you request it.

Please note that Blue Cross Blue Shield will not reimburse for missed appointments, late cancellations or two appointments in one day. You are responsible for my full fee in these instances. You are also responsible for any other services you incur which are not covered under your plan. Please be aware of the parameters of your contract.

Once we have all of the information about your insurance coverage, we will discuss what we can expect to accomplish with the benefits that are available and what will happen if they run out before you feel ready to end our sessions. It is important to remember that you always have the right to pay for my services yourself to avoid the problems described above.

Please note I do all of my own billing and maintenance of records.

**Medicare Eligible Clients**

Please note that I am not a Medicare provider and I am listed as a clinician who has “opted out” of this program. If you are Medicare eligible, you or your legal representative, are responsible in full for payment of fees. Medicare payment limits do not apply to services I provide nor will they pay for treatment I conduct. Medigap plans will not and other supplemental plans may elect not to make payments for services Medicare will not pay for. As my client, you may not submit a bill from me for reimbursement from Medicare although you are free to receive other Medicare-covered services from clinicians who have not opted out of the program.

**Contacting Me**

I am often not immediately available by telephone. While I am usually in my office between 11:00 am and 7:00 pm on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays I probably will not answer the phone when I am with a patient. When I am unavailable, my telephone is answered by voicemail that I monitor frequently. I will make every effort to return your call on the same day you make it, with the exceptions of weekends and holidays. Please inform me of times you will be available when you leave a message. If you are unable to reach me and feel that you cannot safely wait for me to return your call, contact the nearest emergency room and ask for the psychologist or psychiatrist on call, or simply call 911. If I will be unavailable for an extended period of time, I will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact if necessary.

Please note that I do not communicate with clients by email as this is not considered confidential.

**Professional Records**

The laws and standards of my profession require that I keep treatment records. You are entitled to receive a copy of your records unless I believe that seeing them would be emotionally damaging, in which case I will be happy to send them to a mental health professional of your choice. As these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. If you wish to see your records, I recommend that you review them in my presence so that we can discuss the contents. Patients will be charged my hourly fee for any professional time spent in responding to information requests.

**Minors**

If you are under eighteen years of age, please be aware that the law may provide your parents the right to examine your treatment records. It is my policy to request an agreement from parents that they agree to give up access to your records. If they agree, I will provide them with only general information about our work together, unless I feel there is a high risk you will seriously harm yourself or someone else. In this case, I will notify both you and your parents of my concern. Before giving them any information, I will discuss the matter with you, if possible, and do my best to handle objections you may have with what I am prepared to discuss.

**Confidentiality**

In general, the privacy of all communications between a patient and a psychologist is protected by law and I can only release information about our work together with your written permission. There are, however, a few exceptions.

In most legal proceedings, you have the right to prevent me from providing any information about your treatment. In some proceedings involving child custody and those in which your emotional condition is an important issue, a judge may order my testimony if he/she determines that the issues demand it. In the event of a court order I will review with you the steps you are required to take in order to file an objection.

There are some situations in which I am legally obligated to take action to protect others from harm, even if I have to reveal some information about a patient’s treatment. If I believe that a child, elderly or disabled person is being abused, I am required to file a report with the appropriate state agency.

If I believe that a patient is threatening serious bodily harm to another, I am required to take protective actions. These actions may include notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, or seeking hospitalization for the patient. If the patient threatens to harm himself/herself, I am obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her and/or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.

I review clinical cases periodically with licensed colleagues. During these consultations, I make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of my patient. These consultants are also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you do not object, I will not tell you about these consultations unless I feel that it is important to our work together.

While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important that we discuss any questions or concerns that you may have at our next meeting. I will be happy to discuss these issues with you if you need specific advice, but formal legal advice may be needed because the laws governing confidentiality are quite complex and I am not an attorney.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and agree to abide by its terms during our professional relationship.

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Signature Date