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Therapy Information

We appreciate the opportunity to work with you. From the first session to the last, we hope you will enjoy your experience in our private, family-friendly counseling practice.

Counseling: CAWM counseling services are provided by licensed therapists in the State of Michigan. Each provider will assess your needs and develop an individualized treatment plan based on your needs. Our interventions are empirically driven, which means that they have been researched, and demonstrate scientific effectiveness.

Your first session (45-55 minutes) will help us understand why you have sought treatment, and gather symptom/background information. By the end of the 1st or 2nd session, you will receive some initial feedback and recommendations. As a team, you and your therapist will identify goals and select the best treatment methods to help you reach these goals.

The more committed and involved you are in therapy, the quicker you will progress toward your goals. Talking about what your experiences mean to you and what strong feelings are involved is one way you can be an active partner in therapy. Practicing new skills, reading, or doing homework, will also significantly impact your progress. Change will sometimes be easy and quick, but more often it will be slow and frustrating, and you will need to keep trying. There are no instant, painless cures and no "magic pills." However, you can learn new ways of living that will likely greatly improve how you feel.

Most often, therapy starts with weekly sessions (45 minutes) and tapers to biweekly or monthly sessions as needed. Ending therapy should not be done casually, although you or your therapist may decide to end it if either believes it is in your best interest. If you wish to stop therapy, please meet for at least one more session to review your goals, progress and future needs. If you would like to take a "break" from therapy to try it on your own, let's make a plan for how you will know if/when you will need to re-enter treatment.

The Benefits and Risks of Therapy: Therapy, like any treatment has risks and benefits. There is a risk that clients will temporarily have uncomfortable levels of sadness, guilt, anxiety, anger, frustration, loneliness, helplessness, or other negative feelings, as they work through difficult topics. You may recall unpleasant memories which may bother you at work or in school. As you grow and improve, your relationships with those around you will also change. Some people in your life may react negatively to your growth. Most of these risks are expected when people are making important changes in their lives. Even with our best efforts, there is a risk that therapy may not be effective.

Therapy benefits have been shown by scientists in hundreds of well-designed research studies. People who are depressed or anxious may find their mood improving. Others may no longer feel afraid, angry, or anxious. In therapy, people have a chance to talk things out fully until feelings are relieved or the problems are solved. Relationships and coping skills may improve greatly. You may get more satisfaction out of social and family relationships and your personal goals and values may become clearer. We do not take on clients we do not believe we can help and we take the treatment of each patient very seriously. Our goal is to make therapy a benefit to you.

Consultations: If you could benefit from a treatment we cannot provide, we will help you to get it. Since we have worked in West Michigan for many years, we are connected with excellent professionals in a wide range of disciplines. Based on your needs, we may recommend a medical exam or use of medication. We are experts in collaborating with medical providers and would be happy to coordinate services for your best care. We have extensive experience working with the school systems. Working with teachers, principals and special ed programming is specialty service we would be happy to provide.

If for some reason treatment is not going well, your therapist might suggest you see another counselor or another professional for an evaluation. It is our professional and ethical responsibility to discontinue treatment if our treatment is not working for you. If you wish for another professional's opinion at any time, or wish to talk with another therapist, we will help you find a qualified person and will provide him or her with the information needed.

What to Expect from Your Relationship with Your Counselor: We follow the standards of our professional organizations (American Psychological Association (APA), and the National Association of Social Workers (NASW)). We are licensed to

practice as mental health providers; we are not lawyers, medical doctors or CPA's. Second, state laws and professional ethics codes require us to keep what you disclose as confidential (See confidentiality section). Respecting privacy is a top priority for CAWM. Third, following professional ethics codes and to provide you with the best care, we cannot have a relationship with you out of the therapy relationship. Therapists cannot befriend clients or treat patients they have ongoing relationships with outside their office.

If you ever become involved in a divorce or custody dispute, we will not provide evaluations or expert testimony in court. You should hire another professional for any evaluation/testimony you require for the following reasons: (1) Our statements will be biased in your favor because of the therapy relationship (2) the testimony might affect your therapy, which is primary.

Confidentiality: We treat the information you disclose with respect and care. It is your right to have therapy sessions and records kept private. If you desire information be sent to another professional, we will have you sign a "consent for release of information." In almost all situations, your confidentiality is protected by federal and state laws and by the rules of our profession. The most common cases in which confidentiality is not protected are:

1. If you were ordered by the court or your employer for evaluation or treatment, the court or employer expects a report. If this is your situation, please talk with your therapist before you say anything you do not want the court or your employer to know.
2. Are you suing someone or being sued? Are you being charged with a crime? If so, and you tell the court that you are seeing a therapist, your counselor may then be ordered to show the court her records. Please consult your lawyer about these issues.
3. If you make a serious threat to harm yourself or another person, the law requires that your therapist try to protect you or that other person. This usually means telling others about the threat. We cannot promise never to tell others about aggressive/serious threats you make.
4. If your therapist believes a child has been or will be abused or neglected, s/he is legally required to report this to the authorities.

If your therapist is away from the office, she will have a trusted therapist "covering" for her. This therapist will be available to you in emergencies. Confidentiality laws still apply. At times we may consult with other professionals to provide you with the highest quality treatment. These professionals are also subject to confidentiality; name and identifying information will be omitted. You may benefit from a consultation with your physician in regards to your treatment or to discuss any medical problems for which you are receiving care. Medicare requires that your therapist notify your physician by telephone or in writing, concerning services that are being provided by unless you request that notification not be made.

Except for situations aforementioned, our staff and your therapist will always maintain privacy. Please do not disclose the identity of any other client being seen in this office. It is our policy to destroy clients' records a minimum of 7 years after the end of treatment and a minimum of 3 years following a child patient turning 18 years old. Records may be kept in file longer based on circumstantial need.

Insurance companies will sometimes ask for information on symptoms, diagnoses, and treatment methods. This "treatment review" will become part of your permanent medical record. We have no control over how insurance companies handle these records and it is our policy to only provide as much information as needed to pay your benefits. You have the right to review your record. If you wish to obtain record information, please discuss it with your therapist. She may temporarily remove parts of your records before review if she believes the information will be harmful to you, but will discuss this with you.

Contacting Your Therapist: If you need to get in touch with your therapist, or need to change/cancel an existing appointment, please call 616.264.3200 and leave that message in your therapist's voicemail box and she will return your call as soon as possible. If support staff is in the office, they may also be able to answer your questions.

Our emergency answering service will contact your therapist for after hours emergencies if you call 616.264.3200. If you have an immediate emergency or crisis, please either call 911, the Pine Rest Contact Center that is open 24/7 at 616-455-9200, Forest View Psychiatric Hospital at 1-800-949-8439, or go to your local hospital ER.

Statement of Principles and Complaint Procedures: We will fully abide by all the rules of APA and NASW and by those of our state licenses. If you are not satisfied with treatment, please raise your concerns immediately. Progress will be slower if your concerns are not worked out. We will make every effort to address complaints you have and to seek solutions. CAWM does not discriminate against: age, sex, marital/family status, race, color, religious beliefs, ethnic origin, place of residence, veteran status, physical disability, health status, sexual orientation, or criminal record unrelated to present dangerousness. This is a commitment, as well as a federal, state, and local law. If you believe you have been discriminated against, please bring this matter to our attention. Thank you.