Professional Disclosure Statement

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Education and Experience

I have a Master of Arts degree in Counselor Education—Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling from Western Michigan University—a program accredited by the Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP). I completed a 600-hour internship at Claystone Clinical Associates (Grand Rapids, MI). My post-graduate supervisor was Barbara Homrich, Ph.D, LP, LPC. I hold certification as a National Certified Counselor (NCC). I also hold a license in the state of Michigan as a limited licensed marriage and family therapist, practicing under the supervision of Dr. Karen Helmeke, Ph.D, LMFT.

I have completed Level 1, Level 2, and Level 3 Practicum training in Gottman Method Couples Therapy, as well as the Gottman specialized trainings in Treating Affairs and Trauma and Couples Therapy and Addiction. I have furthered my knowledge in Acceptance and Commitment Therapy through the ACT Bootcamp/Intensive training. I have attended the 6-day training of Heart-Centered Hypnotherapy and am a certified hypnotist through the Wellness Institute. I also have completed 40-hour training in domestic relationship mediation and 8-hour domestic violence screening protocol through Mediation Services, Holland, MI.

Description of practice--About therapy

I believe that life is about relationships. Whether it is the relationship with family members, friends, co-workers, acquaintances, or even strangers, one is never truly alone. There are times in life though when relationships can be strained and through difficult personal, professional, and family situations. At those times, one may indeed feel alone. It can take courage at that moment to seek help. For that reason, I believe that the counseling process begins by meeting the client where he or she is at and establishing a positive relationship built on care, empathy, and trust.

The type, or model, of therapy I utilize depends on the presenting issues of each client. Rather than adopting a “one-size-fits-all” approach to treatment, I integrate various models of therapy, including: Acceptance and Commitment therapy (ACT), Emotionally-focused Couples Therapy (EFT), Gottman Method Couples Therapy (GMCT), and hypnotherapy. Information about these models of therapy can be found on my practice website.

I take clinical notes during our meetings—either with paper and pen or on my computer. You may find it useful to take your own notes to remember important points or steps you plan to take. Sometimes—particularly in couples/family sessions—I’ll ask you to write down what your partner or other family member is saying as part of teaching new interpersonal communication skills.

An important part of your therapy will be practicing new skills that you'll learn in session. I might ask you to do exercises, keep a journal/records, etc. The purpose of this is to help strengthen and reinforce personal change (which—for most people—takes determination and effort). There can be resistance when changing well-developed habits. However, you can learn new ways of looking at your problems and these new perspectives will be very helpful for changing your feelings and reactions.

Process of Therapy—Initiation through Termination

The first few sessions are very introductory—you getting to know me and me getting to know you. I believe therapy is best for you when it doesn't feel "rushed" or "hurried." Some clients come once a week, others once every other week. Some only need a session check-in (1-2 sessions), while others' therapy goals involve a longer duration of therapy. Generally, I recommend we meet for 6-8 sessions and then either during or at the end of those sessions, evaluate a course moving forward. I also recognize there are occasions when therapy may be more time limited (for instance, insurance only covers a set number of sessions) and we can adjust sessions accordingly.

If you wish to stop therapy at any time, I ask that you agree now to meet for at least one final session to review our work together. "Dropping-out" does indeed happen—and as a professional, I have a moral and ethical responsibility to see to client welfare and safety. Failure to show for an appointment, calls/voicemail/email not returned, or absence of communication without cause may require me to follow-up with you, your emergency contact persons, and/or (if circumstances warrant it) the police to assess for your well-being and safety.

Risks and benefits of therapy

As with any treatment, there are some risks, as well as many benefits of therapy. For example, in therapy there is a risk that clients will, for a time, have uncomfortable levels of sadness, guilt, anxiety, anger, frustration, loneliness, helplessness, or other negative feelings. Clients may recall unpleasant memories. Also, clients in therapy may have problems with people important to them, like relatives and peers. Family secrets may be told. Therapy may disrupt a marital or couple relationship, and may even lead to a separation or divorce. Sometimes, too, a client's problems may worsen after the beginning of treatment. Risks like these are temporary and should be expected when people are making important changes in their lives. Finally, even with our best efforts, there is a risk that therapy may not work out as you would like. All of these should be weighed against the costs of not changing and continuing as you are.

While you consider these risks, you should know also that many benefits of therapy have been shown by numerous well-designed research studies. Most clients will find their symptoms greatly lessened, will feel more confident and relaxed, and will improve their daily functioning. People who are depressed may find their mood lifting. Other clients may no longer feel afraid, angry, or anxious. In therapy, people have a chance to talk things out fully until their feelings are relieved or the problems are resolved. Clients' relationships and coping skills can improve greatly. They may get more satisfaction out of social and family relationships. Their personal goals and values may become clearer. They may grow in many directions—as persons, in their close relationships, in their work or schooling, and in the ability to enjoy their lives.

About our appointments
Sessions will usually meet for 50-55 minutes. While I am willing to be flexible, I have found that therapy is more effective when it occurs at a regular day/time. If there is a certain day and time you prefer, it is best to schedule those appointments well in advance. I cannot "save" time blocks for unscheduled clients. I will inform you in advance of any time I am away from the office.

For couples and families, the usual 50-55 minute session can be limiting and interfere with potential positive gains in therapy. In order to foster the most gains, I offer to couples and families the possibility of attending an extended session length of 75-80 minutes. Details about this arrangement can be discussed at the first session.

Cancellations and no-shows
We agree to meet at my office and to be on time. As a client, you have access to the Client Portal where you have the ability to check schedule availability, schedule your own appointments (pending clinician approval), and update appointment reminder settings. These appointment reminders, delivered 1-3 days before your appointment, can be sent via e-mail and/or text message.

Since there are advanced reminders for appointments, I reserve the right to charge for late cancellations and no-shows. In all cases, insurance does not reimburse for late cancellations or no-shows. Here is a breakdown of how late cancellations/no shows are handled:

Case A: Cancellation/change at least 24-hours before scheduled session (includes weekends)---no charge
Case B: Late cancellation LESS THAN 24-hours before scheduled session (includes weekends) or no-show for appointments--full self-pay rate charged ($125)

I understand that difficulties and emergencies do arise. There are circumstances when making it to a session is impossible. For this reason, for your first missed session (case B only) due to a personal/family/work issue, I allow you to utilize "one free pass," meaning you can utilize this at the time or choose to use it another date in the future if you need to cancel within 24 hours. In the case of no-show for appointment, a phone call will be made within 20-minutes after the start of the session for follow-up. At that time, Case B may be applied. If client does not follow-up with clinician—either at that time or within 24 hours (phone call, email, or voicemail), full fee may be charged.

This policy is not about penalizing with fees and charges—it's about responsibility. It's my hope that clients recognize they need to be responsible for their own benefit (consistent treatment) and that I have a respectable boundary as well—namely, that my time and my dedication to client treatment are very valuable. I feel it's important that both responsibility and respectability to boundaries can be honored.

What to expect from our relationship
As a professional, I will use my best knowledge and skills to help you. This includes following the standards of the American Counseling Association (ACA), the American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy (AAMFT), the National Board of Certified Counselors (NBCC), the Michigan Board of Counseling, and the Michigan Board of Marriage and Family Therapists. In your best interests, the ACA and AAMFT put limits on the relationship between a therapist and a client, and I will abide by these.

If you ever become involved in a divorce, custody dispute, or any other legal matter, I want you to understand and agree that I will not provide records, evaluations, depositions, or testimony in court. My position is based on several reasons: (1) I may not possess the professional skills to make decisions about issues besides those we deal with in therapy; (2) My statements will be seen as biased in your favor because we have a therapy relationship; and (3) such testimony might affect our therapy relationship, and I must put this relationship first. You should hire a different mental health professional for any evaluations or testimony you require. I'd be happy to refer you to those with this expertise.

Fees
Regular self-pay rate for 50-55 minute therapy session*:* Fee is $125

Payment for services (including co-payment) is made at the start of the session. I have found this arrangement helps us stay focused on our goals and works best. It also allows me to keep my fees lower, because it cuts down on bookkeeping costs. I suggest you make out your check or ready credit card before each session begins, so that our time will be used fully. Other payment or fee arrangements must be worked out before the end of our first meeting. I accept cash, checks, credit and debit cards. Because I expect full payment at the time of our meetings (either the co-pay or the self-pay rate), I usually do not send bills. A statement or summary of services will be provided upon request. The statement can be used for health insurance claims, as described in the next session. It will show all of our meetings, the charges for each meeting, how much has been pain, and how much (if any) is still owed.

If there is any problem with charges, billing, or any money-related point, please bring it to my attention immediately. I will do the same with you. Such problems interfere greatly with our work and are best worked out openly and quickly.

Health Insurance
Because I am a licensed mental health provider, health insurance plans will help you pay for therapy. Since health insurance is written by many different providers, I cannot tell you what your plan covers. Please contact your provider and ask about "Outpatient psychotherapy" or "Behavioral Health" benefits. While my office will attempt to follow-up on these benefits, in the end, you will be responsible for checking insurance coverage, deductibles, payment rates, copayments, and so forth. You—not the insurance company or any other person or company—are responsible for paying the fees we agree upon.

If you elect to utilize such benefits, decisions about what kind of care you need, from whom, and how much of it you can receive will be reviewed by the plan. The plan has rules, limits, and procedures that we should discuss. Please bring your plan's card to your first session so we can talk about it and decide what to do.

My office aims to maintain the privacy of your records, but I ask you to understand that I have no control over what happens to your records after they leave my office. This may happen when an insurance company asks for and reviews my records as part of its regular audits. It will usually be looking to see that services are compatible with the severity of your limitations and diagnoses. This is called "evaluating the medical necessity of treatment."

Confidentiality

I will treat with great care all the information you share with me. It is your legal right that our sessions and my records about you be kept private. That is why I ask you to sign a "release of information" form before I can talk about you or send records about you to anyone else. In general, I will tell no one what you tell me. I will not even reveal that you are receiving treatment from me.

In all but a few rare situations, your confidentiality (that is, our privacy) is protected by federal and state laws and by the rules of my profession. Here are the most common cases in which confidentiality is *not* protected:

1. If you were sent to me by a court or an employer for evaluation and treatment, the court or employer expects a report for me. If this is your situation, please talk with me before you tell me anything you do not want the court or your employer to know. You have a right to tell me only what you are comfortable with telling.

2. If you make a serious threat to harm yourself or another person, the law requires me to try to protect you or that other person. This usually means telling others about the threat. I cannot promise never to tell others about threats you make.

3. If I believe a vulnerable member of the population (child, elder, handicapped) has been or will be abused or neglected, I am legally required to report this to the authorities.

There are two situations in which I might talk about part of your case with another therapist. I ask you now to understand and agree to let me do so in these two situations.

1. When I am away from the office, I will have arranged a trusted fellow therapist who will be available to you in emergencies. In such an emergency, he or she needs to know about you. Of course, this therapist is bound by the same laws and rules as I am to protect your confidentiality.

2. As a licensed professional, I meet regularly with my supervisors and other therapists for consultation. This helps me in giving high-quality treatment. These persons are also required to keep your information private. You name will never be given to them, some

information will be changed or omitted, and they will be told only as much as they need to know to understand your situation.

If couples therapy (where there is more than one adult present), understand you give your consent for the undersigned therapist to maintain a single file for each joint therapy session in which you and your partner participate and for either you or your spouse to have the right to access all the information recorded by the therapist in the joint file at any time. For family therapy, all of the adults present will have to sign a release of information.

Consultation

If you (or a family member) could benefit from a treatment I cannot provide, I will help you get to it. You have a right to ask me about such other treatments, their risks, and their benefits. Based on what I learn about your problems, I may recommend alternative treatments that may be helpful to you. If I do this, I will fully discuss my reasons with you so that you can decide what is best. I believe there is a great benefit in coordinating with other professionals. Through a signed release form, you have the right to give /deny permission for me to coordinate services with other medical professionals.

If you need to contact me

I cannot promise that I will be available at all times. Although I am usually in the office Monday-Thursday, I do not take phone calls when I'm with clients. You can always leave a message on my secure voicemail or email, and I will return your message as soon as I can. Generally, I will return messages within 24 hours, with the exception of weekends and holidays. If you don't hear from me within 48 hours, please assume that a mechanical issue has occurred and call back. Emergency contact numbers are provided on my website.

If I need to contact someone about you

If there is an emergency during our work together, or I become concerned about your personal safety, I am required by law and by the rules of my profession to contact someone close to you to protect you. I am also required to contact this person, or the authorities, if I become concerned about your harming someone else. Please provide the name of this person and information of your chosen contact person on the intake form.

Complaint Procedures

If you are not satisfied with any area of our work, please raise your concerns with me as soon as possible. Our work together will be slower and harder if your concerns with me are not worked out. I will make every effort to hear any complaints you have and seek resolution. If you would like to file a complaint regarding my counseling services, please contact the following:

Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs
Bureau of Professional Licensing
Investigations & Inspections Division
P.O. Box 30670
Lansing, MI 48909
(517) 373-9196