



# **Grelling Psychology Associates**

*sensitive, professional care for individuals and families*

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## **CLINICAL SERVICES - POLICIES AND PROCEDURES**

Welcome to our practice. This document contains important information about our professional services and business policies. Please note any questions that you might have, as your therapist will be happy to discuss them with you.

### **PSYCHOTHERAPY**

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. There are a number of different approaches that can be utilized to resolve the problems you hope to address. It varies depending on the personalities of the psychologist and client, and the particular problems you hope to address. There are many different methods a therapist may use to deal with those problems. 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 you talk about both during the sessions and at home.

Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Because 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. However, there are no guarantees as to what you will experience.

Your first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your or your child's needs. By the end of the evaluation, your therapist will be able to offer you some initial impressions of what your work will include, and an initial treatment plan to follow, if you decide to continue. You should evaluate this information along with your assessment of whether you feel comfortable working with them. At the end of the evaluation (or any other point in our work), your therapist will notify you if they believe that they are not the right therapist for you and, if so, they will give you referrals to other practitioners whom they believe are better suited to help you.

Therapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should be thoughtful about the therapist you select. If you have questions about your therapist's procedures, you should discuss them whenever they arise. If your doubts persist, they will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.

Psychotherapy sessions are typically scheduled for one forty-five to fifty-minute session (one appointment hour) each week, though other arrangements can be agreed upon.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL EVALUATIONS**

Psychological evaluations can provide you with information about your or your child's psychological functioning in several areas. This information can then be used by schools, medical doctors, or therapists to aid in treatment, or in the planning of programs. It can also be used to point out areas of specific intellectual or emotional strengths that you may be able to capitalize on in the future. However, sometimes test results do not meet our expectations. In particular, this can occur when they reveal serious emotional or intellectual problems or fail to provide evidence of abilities or disabilities that would allow access to special programs or services. The fact that you are paying for these services does not guarantee any particular test result and you need to be prepared that the findings may not meet your expectations.

Evaluations are normally conducted in three or more sessions lasting from two to four hours, including breaks. These usually follow an initial interview session with the psychologist as well as communication with a client's school, workplace, or other medical providers. The total length of the evaluation will depend on the tests to be administered and you/your child's responses to them. Upon completion of the evaluation, your psychologist will prepare a comprehensive written report of

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the findings. Because this written evaluation is highly technical, your psychologist will typically arrange a time to give you and/or your child feedback about the test results.

In addition, during the course of the evaluation, audio and video recordings may be made of the subject's performance. Such recordings will be held securely along with all other data from the assessment process. While at times such recordings are optional, at other times they are integrated into the computerized administration of some tests. In these cases, there may be no way to administer the test without such recordings. If you have any concerns about this, please discuss them with your evaluator.

While we make every effort to accurately estimate the total cost and length of time required for an assessment, this estimate cannot always be exact. The length of the testing process can vary depending on the examinee's pace and what is discovered during the evaluation. The cost of the evaluation includes not only the time for administering the tests, but the hours required to score the measures, interpret the results, prepare a detailed written report, complete associated phone calls and letters, and provide feedback to you and/or your child. It does not cover ongoing consultation regarding your needs, participation in any legal proceedings arising from the assessment, or any psychotherapeutic treatment of you/your child. An estimated fee will be provided to you on the assessment consent form you will receive, and you will be consulted if for any reason the total cost is expected to exceed the estimated fee.

#### **CANCELLED, LATE, AND MISSED SESSIONS:**

We understand that from time to time clients need to cancel sessions due to schedule conflicts or illness. However, the need to reschedule sessions can lead to scheduling problems for other clients, as well as financial difficulties for our therapists. For this reason, we have maintained the following policy with regard to cancellations:

- 1) Sessions canceled more than 24 hours before the scheduled time will not be charged a cancellation fee. (Please call your therapist's regular contact number to cancel.)
- 2) Late arrivals or "no-shows" will be charged the full fee for the time scheduled.

Furthermore, as a courtesy to your therapist and in order to maintain session availability for all clients, we request that you make every effort to give more than 24 hours notice. Phone messages can be left 24 hours a day and your therapist will discuss with you the best way to contact them.

#### **PROFESSIONAL FEES**

Our therapists have varying hourly fees for psychotherapy depending on their specialty and experience. When seeking a psychological evaluation, you will be given an estimate of the total time required and the resultant cost. Fees for the professional services you will be receiving are included in the consent forms for assessment or psychotherapy services that you have received.

#### **BILLING AND PAYMENTS**

You will be expected to pay for each psychotherapy session at the time it is held, with cash, check, or a credit card. Clients receiving psychological evaluations will be expected to pay ½ the estimated cost prior to beginning the evaluation and the remainder before receipt of the report. (A copy of the written report will not be released without payment.) Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to at the time these services are requested.

We do not accept direct insurance reimbursement, though we will provide you with reasonable documentation to seek such reimbursement on your own. We can typically generate a statement itemizing all services rendered and all payments made during that time, along with additional information needed for insurance reimbursement. We cannot guarantee that any services we provide will or will not be covered by your insurance. We encourage you to reach out to them in advance of starting treatment.

If your account is more than 60 days in arrears and suitable arrangements for payment have not been agreed to, we have the option of using legal means to secure payment, including collection agencies or small claims court. (If such legal action is necessary, the costs of bringing that proceeding will be included in the claim.) In such cases, we would do our best to protect your confidentiality and would release only the information necessary to obtain payment.

#### **OTHER SERVICES**

In addition to weekly appointments, it is our practice to charge your therapist's hourly fee on a

prorated basis for other professional services you may require. These services may include letter writing, telephone conversations that last longer than 15 minutes, attendance at meetings or consultations with other professionals which you have authorized, preparation of records or treatment summaries, or the time required to perform any other service which you may request. If you become involved in litigation in which your therapist is required to participate, you will be expected to pay for the professional time required, even if they are compelled to testify by another party. Because of the complexity and time-consuming nature of legal involvement, you will be billed twice your typical hourly rate for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding or any similar hearing.

### **CONTACTING YOUR THERAPIST**

Therapists in our practice are typically not immediately available by telephone or other means. You can leave messages for therapists on the general practice phone at (925) 215-8694. However, you should make arrangements with your individual therapist for the best manner to contact them. Therapists will make every effort to return your call within 24 hours except for weekends and holidays. Our Teletherapy Consent Form includes additional information about contacting your therapist through other electronic means.

### **EMERGENCIES**

If you cannot reach your therapist by phone, and you feel that you cannot wait for him/her to return your call, you should call 911. In an emergency, you can also arrange to be taken directly to the emergency room of your nearest hospital. If your therapist is unavailable for an extended time, we will provide you with the name of a trusted colleague whom you can contact if necessary.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY AND LIMITS**

In general, the privacy of all communications between a client and a therapist is protected by law, and your therapist can only release information about their work to others with your written permission. But there are a few exceptions:

- If a therapist believes that a client is threatening serious bodily harm to another person, the therapist is required to take protective actions. These actions may include notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, and/or seeking hospitalization for the client.
- If a client is threatening to harm themselves, their therapist may be obligated to seek hospitalization for them. Our therapists may also contact family members or others who can help to ensure your safety. If such a situation occurs in the course of your treatment, your therapist will make an effort to discuss it with you before taking any action. However, they reserve the right to contact others for your safety without warning you in advance.
- There are some situations in which a therapist is legally obligated to take action to protect others from harm, even if they have to reveal some information about a client's treatment. For example, if they believe that a child, elderly person or disabled person is being abused or has been abused, they are required to make a report to the appropriate state agency. Such reports may require disclosing the source of the information, even if you are not directly involved.
- In most legal proceedings, you have the right to prevent your therapist from providing any information about your treatment. However, in some legal proceedings, a judge may order their testimony if they determine the issues demand it, and they must comply with that court order. In addition, if you make your mental health status or treatment the subject of a lawsuit you may waive your right to the confidentiality of those records.
- Your therapist may occasionally find it helpful to consult other professionals about a case. During a consultation, they will make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of their clients. The consultant is also legally bound to keep the information confidential. Ordinarily, your therapist will not tell you about these consultations unless they believe that it is important to your work together.

While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important that you discuss any questions or concerns that you may have now or in the future with your therapist.

### **SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS FOR MINORS**

If you are seeking therapy for your minor child, it is important for you to understand our approach to child therapy and agree to some rules about your child's confidentiality during the course of his/her treatment. The information herein is in addition to the information contained in the rest of this document and may supersede sections related to the treatment of adults.

In order to authorize mental health treatment for your child, you must have either sole or joint legal custody of your child. If you are separated or divorced from the other parent of your child, please notify your therapist at the outset of the treatment. They will ask you to provide them with a copy of the most recent custody decree that establishes custody rights of you and the other parent or otherwise demonstrates that you have the right to authorize treatment for your child.

If you are separated or divorced from the child's other parent, please be aware that it is our policy to notify the other parent that a therapist is meeting with your child. We believe it is important that all parents have the right to know, unless there are truly exceptional circumstances, that their child is receiving mental health evaluation or treatment.

One risk of child therapy involves disagreements among parents and/or disagreements between parents and therapist regarding the child's treatment. If such disagreements occur, your therapist will strive to listen carefully so that they can understand your perspectives and fully explain their perspective. You can resolve such disagreements, or you can agree to disagree, so long as this enables your child's therapeutic progress. Ultimately, however, parents decide whether therapy will continue. If either parent decides that therapy should end, your therapist will honor that decision, however, they may ask that you allow them the option of having a few closing sessions to appropriately end the treatment relationship.

In the course of their treatment of a child, our therapists may meet with their parents/guardians either separately or together. Please be aware, however, that, at all times, the client is the child – not the parents/guardians nor any siblings or other family members of the child. If your therapist meets with you or other family members in the course of your child's treatment, they will make notes of that meeting in your child's treatment records. Please be aware that those notes will be available to any person or entity that has legal access to your child's treatment record.

In some situations, therapists are required by law or by the guidelines of their profession to disclose information to parents or others, whether or not they have your or your child's permission. Some of these situations include times when:

- Child clients tell their therapist they plan to cause serious harm or death to themselves, and the therapist believes they have the intent and ability to carry out this threat in the very near future. The therapist must take steps to inform a parent or guardian or others of what the child has told them and how serious they believe this threat to be and to try to prevent the occurrence of such harm.
- Child clients tell their therapist they plan to cause serious harm or death to someone else, and the therapist believes they have the intent and ability to carry out this threat in the very near future. In this situation, the therapist must inform a parent or guardian, or others, and they may be required to inform the person who is the target of the threatened harm and the police.
- Child clients are doing things that could cause serious harm to them or someone else, even if they do not intend to harm themselves or another person. In these situations, the therapist will need to use their professional judgment to decide whether a parent or guardian should be informed.
- Child clients tell their therapist, or they otherwise come to reasonably believe that a child is being neglected or abused (physically, sexually, or emotionally) or that it appears that they have been neglected or abused in the past. In this situation, the therapist is required by law to report the alleged abuse to the appropriate state child-protective agency. Such reports are required even if your child discloses the abuse of another child, such as a relative, friend, or classmate.
- A court orders the therapist to disclose information.

Despite the circumstances noted above, therapy is most effective when a trusting relationship exists

between the therapist and the client. Privacy is especially important in earning and keeping that trust. As a result, it is important for children to have a "zone of privacy" where they feel free to discuss personal matters without fear that their thoughts and feelings will be immediately communicated to their parents. This is particularly true for adolescents who are naturally developing a greater sense of independence and autonomy.

It is our policy to provide parents with general information about their child's treatment, but NOT to share specific information the child has disclosed to their therapist without your child's agreement. This includes activities and behavior that you may not approve of — or might be upset by — but that do not put your child at risk of serious and immediate harm. However, if your child's risk-taking behavior becomes more serious, then the therapist will need to use their professional judgment to decide whether your child is in serious and immediate danger of harm. If they feel that your child is in such danger, they will communicate this information to you.

**Example:** If your child tells the therapist that they have tried alcohol at a few parties, the therapist would generally keep this information confidential. If your child tells them that they are drinking and driving or are regularly a passenger in a car with a driver who is drunk, they would not keep this information confidential from you. If your child tells the therapist, or if they believe based on things they learn about your child, that your child is addicted to drugs or alcohol, they would not keep that information confidential.

**Example:** If your child tells their therapist that they are having voluntary, protected sex with a peer, the therapist would generally keep this information confidential. If the child tells their therapist that, on several occasions, the child has engaged in unprotected sex with strangers or in unsafe situations, they would not keep that information confidential.

You can always ask your therapist questions about the types of information they would disclose. You can ask in the form of "hypothetical situations," such as: "If a child told you that they were doing \_\_\_\_\_, would you tell the parents?"

Even when you have agreed to keep your child's treatment information confidential, your therapist may believe that it is important for you to know about a particular situation that is going on in your child's life. In these situations, they will encourage your child to tell you, and they will help your child find the best way to do so. Also, when meeting with you, your therapist may sometimes describe your child's problems in general terms, without using specifics, in order to help you know how to be more helpful to your child.

Although the laws of California may ultimately give parents the right to see any written records kept about their child's treatment, by signing the accompanying consent to treatment, you are agreeing that your child or teen should have a "zone of privacy" in their meetings with me, and you agree not to request access to your child's written treatment records.

When a family is in conflict, particularly conflict due to parental separation or divorce, it is very difficult for everyone, particularly for children. Although a therapist's responsibility to their child client may require their helping to address conflicts between the child's parents, their role will be limited to providing treatment to support the child. You agree that in any child custody/visitation proceedings, neither of you will seek to subpoena your child's records or ask their therapist to testify in court, whether in person or by affidavit or to provide letters or documentation expressing their opinion about parental fitness or custody/visitation arrangements.

Please note that your agreement may not prevent a judge from requiring your therapist's testimony, even though they will not do so unless legally compelled. If they are required to testify, they are ethically bound not to give an opinion about either parent's custody, visitation suitability, or fitness. If the court appoints a custody evaluator, guardian *ad litem*, or parenting coordinator, they will provide information as needed, if appropriate releases are signed or a court order is provided, but they will not make any recommendation about the final decision(s). Furthermore, if they are required to appear as a witness or to otherwise perform work related to any legal matter, the party responsible for their participation agrees to reimburse them at double their standard hourly rate the rate for time spent

traveling, speaking with attorneys, reviewing and preparing documents, testifying, being in attendance, and any other case-related costs.

**QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS**

If you have any questions regarding these policies or procedures, please do not hesitate to speak with your therapist regarding those issues. You will be notified of any changes to these policies in writing. Thank you.