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## **Informed Consent for Behavioral Health Therapy Services**

### **SERVICE AGREEMENT**

Welcome to Higher Ground Healing. This document contains important information about our professional services and business policies. Although these documents are long and sometimes detailed, it is very important that you understand them. When you sign this document, it will also represent an agreement between us. We can discuss any questions you have when you sign them or at any time in the future.

Therapy is a relationship between people that works in part because of clearly defined rights and responsibilities held by each person. As a client in psychotherapy, you have certain rights and responsibilities that are important for you to understand. There are also legal limitations to those rights that you should be aware of. Higher Ground Healing has corresponding responsibilities to you. These rights and responsibilities are described in the following sections.

#### **I. SERVICES**

**Psychotherapy** has both benefits and risks. Risks may include experiencing uncomfortable feelings, (sadness, guilt, anxiety, anger, frustration, loneliness and helplessness), because the process of psychotherapy often requires discussing the unpleasant aspects of your life. However, psychotherapy has been shown to have benefits for individuals who undertake it. Therapy often leads to a significant reduction in feelings of distress, increased satisfaction in interpersonal relationships, greater personal awareness and insight, increased skills for managing stress and resolutions to specific problems. There are, however, no guarantees about what will happen. Psychotherapy requires a very active effort on your part.

Higher Ground Healing offers a treatment modality called **Equine Assisted Psychotherapy** which is an experiential form of psychotherapy where horses are involved in the sessions. “Experiential” means that you will be involved in hands-on experiences with the horses designed to reflect things going on in your life. The process is not always about interacting with the treatment team, although that will happen at times. It is about providing you the opportunity to experience, explore, problem-solve, discover, be creative, gain insight and experience practical applications of what you are learning in the moment. The process is about “doing” along with the “talking.”

**Why horses?** There are several reasons we choose to use horses in this work, but primarily it is due to their nature as a social and prey animal. As a result of this nature, they have an extraordinary ability to read our nonverbal communication – picking up on messages we are sending which we are not always conscious we are doing. With this, they start responding to us

in familiar ways reminding us of other people and things in our life. It is through this they become metaphors (symbols) providing us the opportunity to work on ourselves in relation to those aspects of our lives.

Horses do not know our past, education, gender, race or other labels we may apply to ourselves and each other. They are in the moment and can be a part of this relationship without the biases we humans put on each other. This provides even more value in the insight they can provide us about ourselves.

There are some risks in being around horses due to their size and nature of being an animal. This is covered in the Liability Release Form we have provided for your review and signature and which we have covered verbally with you. It is important you understand the risks and benefits and ask any questions you may have about that in making your decision to be involved in these services.

#### Higher Ground Healing's guidelines for Equine Assisted Psychotherapy.

1. Sessions are conducted by a facilitating team (treatment team) of a Licensed Mental Health Professional (MH) and a qualified Equine Specialist (ES) in all GROUP sessions. INDIVIDUAL sessions will be held with either both an MH and an ES or a MH who is dually certified as an ES. This determination will be made by the professional team and will be discussed with you prior to therapy. These professionals are EAGALA Certified which means completion of specialized training in this model, requirements of ongoing continuing education and adherence to high standards of professionalism and practice. While both members of the team are involved in your therapy process, the role of the ES is to oversee physical safety needs and provide observations on the behaviors of the horses. The MH is there to oversee the psychotherapy process and help you make the parallels of the horse observations to your therapy goals and life.
2. All sessions are on the ground – there is no riding of horses involved in the treatment process. This is psychotherapy and even though you may learn a thing or two about horses, it is not the intent or focus to learn about horses or how to ride them. We are here to address your therapy goals and we commit to utilizing the methods we have found to best support that focus.
3. The process is solution-focused – meaning we believe you have the best solutions for yourself when provided the opportunity to discover them. We are here to provide the space and guidance through exploring what is happening in the process. You are an individual, and every life situation you are involved in will have its own unique solutions which fit best for you – we are here along with the horses to help you find them.
4. This process also incorporates “Best Practice” or “Evidence Based” interventions as determined by the Mental Health profession.

The first 2 sessions will involve assessing your needs and working with you to create a **treatment plan** to outline your therapy goals and objectives and address any questions regarding diagnosis, goals and estimated length of treatment. We will periodically review this plan with you to discuss progress or changes in the therapy goals.

If you have questions about our procedures, please discuss them with us whenever they arise.

## **II. APPOINTMENTS**

Appointments will ordinarily be 50-60 minutes in duration, once per week at a time we agree on, although some sessions may be more or less frequent as needed. If you need to cancel or reschedule a session, we ask that you provide us with 24 hours notice. If it is possible, we will try to find another time to reschedule the appointment. In addition, you are responsible for coming to your session on time; if you are late, your appointment will still need to end on time. Due to the nature of our work, we hold high standards for accountability. If you miss appointments 3 times, you will be discharged. Please initial that you understand our cancellation policy \_\_\_\_\_.

## **III. PROFESSIONAL FEES**

We will be billing your insurance provider directly. You will not be responsible for payment of services. If you have a co-pay, we will inform you. This is due at the time of service.

## **IV. PROFESSIONAL RECORDS**

We are required to keep appropriate records of the therapy services we provide. Your records are maintained in a secure location per professional standards. We keep brief records noting that you were here, your reasons for seeking therapy, the goals and progress we set for treatment, your diagnosis, topics we discussed, your medical, social, and treatment history, records we receive from other providers, copies of records we send to others, and your billing records. Except in unusual circumstances that involve danger to yourself, you have the right to a copy of your file. Because these are professional records, they may be misinterpreted and / or upsetting to untrained readers. For this reason, we recommend that you initially review them with us, or have them forwarded to another mental health professional to discuss the contents. If we refuse your request for access to your records, you have a right to have our decision reviewed by another mental health professional, which we will discuss with you upon your request. You also have the right to request that a copy of your file be made available to any other health care provider at your written request.

## **V. CONFIDENTIALITY**

All sessions and their content, as well as your records, will be kept strictly confidential. To the extent possible, you will be informed before confidential information is disclosed, and in that event only the essential information required by law or to collect payment will be revealed.

For children 15 and older, we request an agreement between the client and the parents allowing us to share general information about treatment progress and attendance, as well as a treatment summary upon completion of therapy. All other communication will require the child's agreement, unless we feel there is a safety concern (see also above section on Confidentiality for exceptions), in which case we will make every effort to notify the child of the intention to disclose information ahead of time and make every effort to handle any objections that are raised. For children under the age of 15, we will use clinical judgment to disclose necessary information to the parent/guardian as it is appropriate to meeting treatment goals.

There are legal limits to this confidentiality creating circumstances in which we may disclose mental health records without consent or authorization which include: 1) If we feel you are a danger to yourself or others, 2) If we suspect a child or elderly or incapacitated person is abused or neglected, 3) Disclosure is required by the court.

Information about your privacy rights is described in a separate document entitled HIPAA Notice of Privacy Practices. You have been provided with a copy of that document and we have discussed those issues. Please remember that you may reopen the conversation at any time during our work together.

## **VI. CONTACTING US**

We are often not immediately available by telephone. We do not answer our phone when in session with clients or otherwise unavailable. At these times, you may leave a message on our confidential voice mail and your call will be returned as soon as possible. If, for any number of unforeseen reasons, you do not hear from us or we are unable to reach you, and you feel you cannot wait for a return call or if you feel unable to keep yourself safe, please go to your local hospital emergency room or call 911 and ask to speak to the mental health worker on call.

## **VII. OTHER RIGHTS**

If you are unhappy with what is happening in therapy, we hope you will talk with us so that we can respond to your concerns. Such comments will be taken seriously and handled with care and

respect. You may also request that we refer you to another therapist and are free to end therapy at any time. You have the right to considerate, safe and respectful care, without discrimination as to race, ethnicity, color, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, or source of payment. You have the right to ask questions about any aspects of therapy and about our specific training and experience. You have the right to expect that we will not have social or sexual relationships with clients or with former clients.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understand this Agreement and agree to their terms.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Patient or Personal Representative

\_\_\_\_\_  
Printed Name of Patient or Personal Representative

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Description of Personal Representative's Authority: \_\_\_\_\_