

## INFORMED CONSENT TO COUNSELING

### MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the clinician and client, and the particular problems you are experiencing. There are many different methods BCA professionals 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 talked about both during 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 many benefits. 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.

The first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, the BCA professional will be able to offer you some first impressions of what therapy 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 the BCA professional. 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 any procedures, you should discuss them with the BCA professional. If your doubts persist, your BCA professional will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.

### PROFESSIONAL RECORDS

There are two sections to your clinical record at BCA. One section constitutes your Clinical Record. It includes information about your reasons for seeking therapy, a description of the ways in which your problem impacts on your life, your diagnosis, the goals set for treatment, your progress towards those goals, your medical and social history, your treatment history, any past treatment records received from other providers, reports of any professional consultations, your billing records, and any reports that have been sent to anyone, including reports to your insurance carrier. Except in unusual circumstances that involve danger to yourself and others or where information has been supplied by others confidentially, or the record makes reference to another person (unless such other person is a health care provider) and BCA believes that access is reasonably likely to cause substantial harm to such other person, you may examine and/or receive a copy of your Clinical Record if you request it in writing. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. For this reason, BCA recommends that you initially review them in the presence of a BCA professional, or have them forwarded to another mental health professional so you can discuss the contents. The exceptions to this policy are contained in the attached Notice Form. If BCA refuses your request for access to your records, you have a right of review (except for information supplied confidentially by others) which can be discussed with you upon request.

In addition, there are Psychotherapy Notes in the record. These notes are for the BCA professionals and are designed to assist in providing you with the best treatment. While the contents of Psychotherapy Notes vary from client to client, they can include the contents of conversations, analysis of those conversations, and how they impact on your therapy. They also contain particularly sensitive information that you may reveal to the BCA professional that is not required to be included in your Clinical Record. Your Psychotherapy Notes are not available to you and cannot be sent to anyone else, including insurance companies without your written, signed Authorization. Insurance companies cannot require your authorizations as a condition of coverage nor penalize you in any way for your refusal to provide it.

### PARENTAL ACCESS OF MINOR'S RECORDS

Clients under 18 years of age (who are not emancipated) and their parents should be aware that the law may allow parents to examine their child's treatment records. Because privacy in psychotherapy is often crucial to successful progress, particularly with teenagers, it is sometimes BCA's policy to request an agreement from parents that they consent to give up their access to their child's records. If they agree, during treatment, the BCA professional will provide them only with general information about the progress of the child's treatment, and his/her attendance at scheduled sessions. BCA will require the child's authorization, unless the child is in danger or is a danger to someone else, in which case, the BCA professional will notify the parents of their concern. Before giving parents any information the BCA professional will discuss the matter with the child, if possible, and do their best to handle any objections he/she may have.