



Congratulations! You have scheduled your first therapy session with me. Many of my new clients have questions regarding what comes next. I decided to put together this handy guide to hopefully answer some of those questions. For most people the decision to go to counseling is a very difficult one. I hope this information will be helpful and lessen any stress of that first appointment.

## **GETTING STARTED**

After you have completed scheduling your intake appointment with me, I will send you an email inviting you to set up your account in my patient portal. This will allow you to complete all of the intake paperwork, review my policies, sign consents, complete any assessments, input your insurance information, place a credit or debit card on file and help me get to know what your needs may be ahead of the appointment. This saves time, because you will not be bogged down with paperwork in the lobby before your appointment, and it allows us to get started right away. I am a paperless office, so this process is all online. I do ask that client portal paperwork be completed at least 24 hours before your appointment so that I have a chance to review your symptom history and needs and can be better prepared for when you come in. While completing this process, it may be helpful to put together a list of providers and people to collect records from or talk to, such as school counselors, doctors, Psychiatrists, past therapists, etc. For this, you will need to fill out a release of information form for each provider or person that I can talk to. If you wish to have a spouse or other family member attend therapy with you, please be sure to complete the collateral session acknowledgement form. Reminders for appointments are sent out as a courtesy, however, it is your responsibility to remember your appointments.

## **CHECK YOUR INSURANCE COVERAGE**

I know insurance can be complicated, which is why I pay someone to handle all of my billing. Whenever possible, please check your insurance benefits before your appointment to prevent surprises with copays or deductibles. My billing person does a great job in verifying benefits, tracking down payers and making sure we are both in the know about what will be paid and what won't. There is a place to upload a copy of your insurance card in the patient portal. This is helpful for Wendi, my billing person, in the event she needs to call to verify or ask questions about your coverage. It is always recommended for you to call and double check with your insurance company about your coverage for mental health services and to ensure that my name is listed as a provider in their system. If you have a deductible or copay, you will be responsible for it the day of your appointment. If you plan to use EAP benefits, please be sure to get the name of the EAP company, a phone number for them, an authorization number for your approved visits and the number of visits you are allowed. If you are a self-pay client, payment is also due the day of your appointment. For your convenience we do have a credit card feature in the patient portal where you can store your information to have your card charged automatically at the end of each session. In the event that an unplanned deductible amount comes back, or your insurance

denies coverage for your services, you will be responsible for the full treatment cost. If you plan to file for disability, social security or have a pending legal matter, please let me know from the beginning. It helps to inform our work together. While doing your intake paperwork, be sure to carefully read my practice policies, privacy policy and informed consent.

### **THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU WANT FROM THERAPY**

There are many reasons and paths leading people to seek out counseling. Anxiety, depression, sadness, feelings of unhappiness, a recent loss or trauma, major life transitions or a long-term struggle with relationships or addictions can be triggering events. Before your session, put some thought into what you want to get out of the process. Sometimes we phrase this as a miracle question “if you could go to sleep tonight and a miracle could happen to solve some of the problems leading you into counseling, what would look different when you wake up tomorrow?” Take out a notebook and write down some thoughts, fears and feelings. Don’t worry about it being perfect, just brainstorm your struggles. Bring that notebook in with you for your appointment so that I can get a better idea of where you are at and where you want to go. I encourage clients to take notes during sessions and to bring thoughts and struggles to appointments.

### **TRY NOT TO MAKE JUDGMENTS ABOUT YOURSELF**

Coming into treatment is not a weakness or a sign of craziness, but many people worry that it will be interpreted that way. It actually takes great courage and is something to be proud of. Insanity has been defined as “doing the same things over and over again and expecting different results”. By coming in for treatment, you are breaking that cycle and starting something new and pulling towards a better sense of balance and control. Lasting change is a process. This will take time, but if you are doing the work you will notice a difference little by little.

### **BE FULLY PRESENT AT YOUR APPOINTMENT.**

Plan to arrive for your appointment 10-15 min early to prevent any traffic issues or other circumstances that may contribute to you being late or missing your appointment. We do not have a secretary or receptionist. Make yourself comfortable on one of the couches in the lobby, and I will come and get you when it is time for your appointment. Please be sure to shut off outside distractions while you are here. The ambience in our building is designed to be peaceful and tranquil. Take some time in the lobby to meditate on your session. What has changed since the last time you were here? What is present for you right now? Turn your phone off or leave it in your car. A ringing phone or the vibrating indicators of a waiting text message or social media post is a BIG distraction and pulls you out of the therapy process. Taking steps to prevent this from happening will help you get the most from your experience. I will fully dedicate my time to you and I ask that you please do the same.

### **BE AS HONEST AS POSSIBLE. I CAN HELP YOU BEST IF YOU ARE.**

Therapy is one of those things where you will get out of it what you put into it. Be prepared to do work and talk. Being vulnerable can be difficult, but it can also be rewarding and a great start toward healing. If you repress thoughts, feelings or fears, I may not be able to help you travel down the right path. Everyone connects and learns differently. If you feel something is off in the therapy process, SPEAK UP, let me know what you are thinking or feeling. Most of the time this can be easily worked through. Your

honest feedback as to what is and is not helpful will drive treatment to better meet your needs. One of the barriers in counseling is telling your therapist what YOU think THEY want to hear rather than what YOU are ACTUALLY experiencing. You will not upset or disappoint me, I WANT to hear your voice and truly help you get what you need. It's not about me, it's about YOU and what you need. That's my job. It becomes difficult however, when I am working harder than my clients, so please be open and honest. This is your time, so please make the most of it. If you are considering applying for disability or anticipate a legal case of any sort, please inform me from the beginning.

## **SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS**

Therapy is a process; it is not a quick fix. In most situations, it took a long time to get to where you are now, it will take time to help you get to where you want to go. In the first several sessions we will typically focus on building connection in therapy and developing a strong plan for treatment. On average, a person will be seen for 6-8 sessions before feeling they are making forward momentum. This is normal. You are resetting patterns and processing difficult events. I will work towards helping you build coping skills and strategies, typically before processing any intense issues, to better prepare you for the emotions of this.

## **IF YOU NEED TO RESCHEDULE OR CANCEL AN APPOINTMENT**

Please take note of my cancellation policy: I understand that things come up from time to time, however the time you schedule to meet with me is reserved especially for you. **48-hour notice of cancellation is required.** A charge of the full rate of \$100 will apply to any late cancellations of less than 48 hours or no show, including first appointment.

In the process of preparing for your first appointment, if you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me by phone or email and I would be happy to discuss any concerns.

I genuinely look forward to working with you!

*Lisa*

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