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AGREEMENT FORM FOR COLLATERALS

INTRODUCTION

I want to thank you for accepting the invitation to assist in treatment. Your participation is important, and may be essential to its success. This document is to inform you about the risks, rights, and responsibilities of your participation as a collateral participant.

WHO IS A COLLATERAL?

A collateral is usually a spouse/partner, family member, or friend who participates in therapy to assist the identified patient. The collateral is not considered to be a patient and is not the subject of the treatment. Psychologists have certain legal and ethical responsibilities to patients, and the privacy of the relationship is given legal protection. My primary responsibility is to my patient and I must place their interests first. You also have somewhat less privacy protection under the law.

THE ROLE OF COLLATERALS IN THERAPY

The role of a collateral will vary greatly. For example, a collateral might attend only one session, either alone or with the patient, to provide information to the therapist and never attend another session. In another case, a collateral might attend all of the patient's therapy sessions and his/her relationship with the patient may be a focus of the treatment, as in couples therapy. We will discuss your specific role at our first meeting and at other appropriate times.

BENEFITS AND RISKS

Psychotherapy often engenders intense emotional experiences, and your participation may involve anxiety or emotional distress. It may also expose or create tension in your relationship with the patient. While your participation can result in better understanding of the patient or an improved relationship, or may even help in your own growth and development, there is no guarantee that this will be the case. Psychotherapy is a positive experience for many, but it is not helpful to all people.

MEDICAL RECORDS

No separate or individual record or chart will be maintained on you in your role as a collateral. Notes about you may be entered into the identified patient's chart. The patient has a right to access the chart and the material contained therein. It is sometimes possible to maintain the privacy of our communications. If that is your wish, we should discuss it before any information is communicated. You have no right to access the patient's chart without his or her written consent. You will not carry a diagnosis, and there is no individualized treatment plan for you.

FEES

As a collateral, you are not responsible for paying for my professional services unless you are otherwise financially responsible for the patient.

CONFIDENTIALITY

You are expected to maintain the confidentiality of the identified patient (your spouse, friend, or child) in your role as a collateral. In addition, both federal and state law protects the confidentiality of information in the patient's chart, including the information that you provide. It can only be released if the identified patient specifically authorizes me to do so. I do require the collateral's written consent on my Authorization Form as well.

There are some exceptions to this general rule:

- If I suspect you are abusing or neglecting a child or a vulnerable adult, I am required to file a report with the appropriate agency.
- If I believe that you are a danger to yourself, I will take actions to protect your life even if I must reveal your identity to do so.
- If you threaten serious bodily harm to another person, I will take necessary actions to protect that person even if I must reveal your identity to do so.
- If you or the patient is involved in a lawsuit, and a court requires that I submit information or testify, I must comply.
- If insurance is used to pay for treatment, the patient's insurance company may require me to submit information about the treatment for claims processing purposes or for utilization review.

DO COLLATERALS EVER BECOME A FORMAL PATIENT?

Collaterals may discuss their own problems in therapy, especially problems that interact with issues of the identified patient. The therapist may recommend separate therapy for a collateral in certain instances (e.g., the collateral may need therapy focusing on their individual problems). Most often, but not always, your clinician will refer you to another therapist for treatment in these situations. There are two reasons the referral may be necessary:

- Seeing two members of the same family, or close friends, may result in a dual role, and potentially cloud the clinician's judgment. Making a referral helps prevent this from happening.
- The clinician must keep a focus on the original, primary task of treatment for the identified patient. For example, if the clinician started treating a child's behavioral problem, then takes on couples therapy with mom and dad to address their relationship problems, the original focus of therapy with the child may be lost. A referral helps the clinician to stay focused.

One exception to these guidelines is when a family therapy approach can be effectively and ethically used to treat all members.

PARENTS AS COLLATERALS

Clinicians specializing in the treatment of children have long recognized the need to treat children in the context of their family. Participation of parents, siblings, and sometimes extended family members is common and often recommended. Parents in particular have more rights and responsibilities in their role as a collateral than in other treatment situations where the identified patient is not a minor. Please be sure to carefully read the section entitled "Minors and Therapy" in my Client Agreement packet for additional details.

SUMMARY

If you have questions about therapy, my procedures, or your role in this process, please discuss them with me. Remember that the best way to assure quality and ethical treatment is to keep communication open and direct with your clinician. You indicate that you have read and understood this document by signing below.

Signature

Date

Name (printed)