

**Mark Zentner, Ph.D.
Licensed Psychologist
8701 Shoal Creek #403
Austin, Texas 78757
512-965-9895**

OFFICE POLICIES

Welcome to my practice. I am pleased to have the opportunity to serve you and hope that this handout will provide information helpful in making an informed decision concerning my services. If you have any questions or concerns about these policies or any other aspect of my practice, please feel free to discuss them with me at any time.

FEES: My basic fee is \$125 per 50-minute outpatient session, including phone contacts. Longer or shorter sessions are prorated from this basic fee. The fee for an initial evaluation is \$150. Fees for psychological testing or reports will be determined on an individual basis and will be discussed with you in advance. Inpatient services are billed at a higher rate.

PAYMENT FOR SERVICE: Clients are expected to pay for services at the time they are provided unless other arrangements have been made. Payment may be made by check or cash. Clients are responsible for payment of all fees even if planning to bill an insurance company for reimbursement.

CANCELLATIONS: A minimum of 24 hours notice is required for rescheduling or cancellation of an appointment. The full fee will be charged for missed sessions without such notification. Please note that many insurance companies will not provide payment for missed sessions.

AVAILABILITY OUTSIDE SESSIONS: Based on my schedule, I am often not immediately available by phone. When I am unavailable, you may leave a voicemail message; I monitor my voicemail frequently. I will make every effort to return your call within 24 hours, with the exception of weekends and holidays.

EMERGENCIES: In the event of an emergency (for example, but not limited to, concerns of imminent action to harm yourself or others), please call and leave a message for me. If you do not reach me when you feel you are experiencing an emergency situation, please immediately contact the 24-hour crisis hotline for the city of Austin at 512-472-4357. You may also contact the nearest emergency room and ask for the mental health professional on call. The other numbers listed below may also be useful if seeking a hospital stay for stabilization, or if you are in a medical crisis:

24-hour Crisis Hotline	512-472-4357
Shoal Creek Psychiatric Hospital	512-324-2029
Austin Lakes Hospital	512-544-5253
General Emergency Number	911

UNPAID ACCOUNTS: If you experience difficulty in meeting your payment obligations, please contact me so we can establish a reasonable payment plan. Overdue accounts (i.e., which remain unpaid for 90 days or for which an agreed-upon payment plan has not been followed) may be turned over to a collection agency as a final resort for non-payment. Overdue accounts may also be subject to interest charges and collection fees.

INDEPENDENT PRACTICE: I am an independent practitioner and have no professional affiliation with any of the other therapists who practice in this office.

CONFIDENTIALITY: The privacy and confidentiality of our sessions are extremely important to me. To the degree allowed by law, information about your contact with me and my office will not be disclosed to any person or organization unless you give me a specific, written release to do so. While you are free to discuss anything that occurs in our sessions with anyone, I am required not to discuss such matters without your written authorization. In all aspects of my practice, communication between my clients and me (or between me and those whom my clients have authorized me to contact) are protected by confidentiality regulations as stipulated by federal and state laws, and by professional standards and ethics.

There are, however, some situations written into law that deny me complete control over confidentiality of communication as follows:

1. I am legally required to report any situation of suspected child abuse or neglect to the proper authorities. I am also legally required to report suspected abuse, neglect, or exploitation of an elderly or disabled person.
2. In some circumstances, my records may be subject to a subpoena issued by the court. In particular, confidentiality may be waived with regard to any suit affecting the parent-child relationship.
3. If I believe a client may harm her/him/themselves or another individual, I am permitted by law to break confidentiality by contacting law enforcement officials and/or medical authorities who may then take protective actions.
4. If I am contacted by an insurance company or an auditor, I may be required to release client information as dictated by law. The law also permits me to release information to a collection agency in order to collect on an overdue account.
5. If a client discloses to me the identity of a mental health professional who engaged in sexual contact with her/him/them during the process of treatment, state law requires me to report that professional to the appropriate district attorney. In this situation, I am not permitted to disclose the identity of the client if she/he/they does not wish to be identified.
6. Confidentiality does not extend to criminal proceedings in Texas.

This list is not exhaustive, but these are the most common circumstances which may occur. The situations outlined above are out of the ordinary and have no impact on the large majority of people seeking professional mental health services. I share this information with you so that you can be fully informed and your questions and concerns can be addressed.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES: Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the psychologist and the client, and the particular problems you bring forward. Psychotherapy is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, it calls for very active effort on your part. In order for the therapy to be most successful, you will have to work on things we talk about both during our sessions and outside of our sessions.

There are many different methods that I use to deal with the issues that you hope to address. The techniques that I use often include dialogue, interpretation, cognitive reframing, exploration of thoughts and feelings, awareness exercises, self-monitoring, journal-keeping, and reading. I may recommend that you consult with another health care provider, or suggest other approaches as an adjunct to our therapy (e.g., group therapy, psychiatric consultation). You have the right to refuse anything that I suggest without being penalized in any way.

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. Making changes in your beliefs or behaviors can be difficult, and can sometimes be disruptive to the relationships you already have. You may find your relationship with me to be a source of strong feelings. 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. Most people who take these risks find that therapy is helpful, and I will do what I can to help you minimize risks and maximize positive outcomes. But, there are no guarantees of what you will experience or the outcome.

Our first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. By the end of the evaluation, I will be able to offer you some first impressions of what our work 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 me. 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 my procedures, we should discuss them whenever they arise. If your doubts persist, I will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion. If I believe that it would be more beneficial to you to work with another mental health professional (e.g., if another professional has expertise in an area that I believe may benefit you), I will share my recommendations and thoughts with you so that we can discuss the possibility of making a change to your treatment.

The duration of therapy is something that is very difficult to predict in advance. Some clients may get the help they need in only a few sessions, while others may choose to continue therapy for several months or years. Please feel free to discuss this with me if you have any questions or concerns.

You have the right to ask questions about anything that happens in therapy. I am always willing to discuss the rationale for my approaches, and to consider alternatives that might work better. You may feel free to ask me to try something that you think will be helpful. You can ask me about my training for working with your concerns, and you can request that I refer you to someone else if you decide that I am not the right therapist for you. You are free to leave therapy at any time.

INSURANCE REIMBURSEMENT: In order for us to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate what resources you have available to pay for therapy. If you have a health insurance policy, it may provide some coverage for mental health treatment. I will provide you with whatever assistance I can in helping you receive the benefits to which you are entitled; however, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of my fees. It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

You should carefully read the section on your insurance company's webpage that describes mental health services. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. Of course, I will provide you with whatever information I can based on my experience and will be happy to help you in understanding the information you receive from your insurance company. If necessary, I am willing to call the company on your behalf.

Due to the rising costs of health care, insurance benefits have increasingly become more complex. It is sometimes difficult to determine exactly how much mental health coverage is available. "Managed Health Care" plans such as HMOs and PPOs often require authorization before they provide reimbursement for mental health services. Some plans may require you to receive treatment from a therapist who is on their provider panel. These plans are often limited to short-term treatment approaches designed to work out specific problems that interfere with a person's usual level of functioning. It may be necessary to seek approval for more therapy after a certain number of sessions. While a lot can be accomplished in short-term therapy, some clients feel that they need more services after insurance benefits end.

You should also be aware that most insurance companies require you to authorize me to provide them with a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes I have to provide additional information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of the entire record (in rare cases). This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored electronically. Though all insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, I have no control over what they do with it once it is in their hands. In some cases, they may share the information with a national medical information databank.

Once we have all of the information about your insurance coverage, we will discuss what we can expect to accomplish with the benefits that are available and what will happen if they run out before you feel ready to end our sessions. It is important to remember that you always have the right to pay for my services yourself to avoid the problems described above (unless prohibited by my contract with the insurance company).

RECORDS: The laws and standards of my profession require that I keep treatment records. You are entitled to receive a copy of the records unless I believe that seeing them would be emotionally damaging, in which case I will be happy to send them to a mental health professional of your choice. Clients will be charged an appropriate fee for any time spent in preparing information requests.

I hereby grant my permission for any counseling, testing, or diagnostic evaluation that may be deemed necessary by my therapist. I understand that therapy is a joint effort between the psychologist and client, the results of which cannot be guaranteed. Progress depends on many factors including motivation, effort, and other life circumstances. I agree that I will be responsible for the payment of all professional fees. I know that I can end therapy at any time I wish and that I can refuse any requests or suggestions made by my therapist. I have read, understand, agree to, and have received a copy of the Office Policies of Mark Zentner, Ph.D.

Client signature _____ Date _____

Full Name (please print) _____