

## **INFORMED CONSENT FOR MENTAL HEALTH THERAPY**



The therapeutic relationship is unique in that it is highly personal and at the same time, a contractual agreement. Given this, it is important for you and your therapist at Present Awakenings Therapy Center to reach a clear understanding of how your relationship will work and what each of you can expect. This document will provide a clear framework for your work together. You can only provide Present Awakenings Therapy Center, PLLC (“Present Awakenings Therapy Center,” “your therapist”, “we,” “our”, “us”) with your informed consent after you and your therapist have discussed your proposed services, the potential risks and benefits of those services, and information about any possible alternative services.

### **THE THERAPEUTIC PROCESS**

You have taken a very positive step by deciding to seek therapy. The outcome of your treatment depends largely on your willingness to engage in the process, which may, at times, result in considerable discomfort. Remembering unpleasant events and becoming aware of problematic patterns may bring on strong emotions and/or body sensations; sometimes, it can even increase mental health symptoms in the short term. There are no miracle cures. We cannot promise that your behavior or circumstances will change. However, your therapist will use their best efforts to support you, understand you and your experiences, help you clarify what it is that you want for yourself, and help you work towards your goals.

Your initial appointments (generally the first two sessions) are used to complete the Intake Assessment. For the Intake Assessment, you will be asked about your reasons for seeking therapy, goals for treatment, and information about any current mental health symptoms, the history of your symptoms/issues, your personal history, your supports, your strengths, your coping skills, and more. If, after the Intake Assessment is completed, we feel that Present Awakenings Therapy Center is not the best fit for your therapeutic treatment, you will be provided with referrals to other therapists better able to assist you. If at any time you feel like your therapist is not a good match for you, we will also be happy to provide referrals so you can work with someone who you feel would be a better match.

After completing the Intake Assessment, your therapist will provide recommendations for your treatment, and you and your therapist will collaborate and agree on a course of treatment. If, at any point during treatment, either you or your therapist has concerns or issues with the other or the course of treatment, whomever has concerns will bring up those concerns to be processed and discussed in sessions; how therapy proceeds will again be a collaborative decision. To get the most out of your therapy, it is important to be open and honest in sessions, be willing to notice and experience cognitions, emotions, and body sensations as they arise in sessions, and think about, experience and/or practice things discussed in sessions, outside of sessions.

When to end treatment is also best when it is a collaborative decision. As you make progress toward your goals, you and your therapist will note and celebrate your progress. When you and your therapist feel you are ready to lessen the frequency of your sessions and/or terminate therapy, you and your therapist will discuss and amend treatment frequency and/or plan for your termination. You are welcome to choose to end treatment at any time with minimal notice; however, engaging in a termination process helps achieve closure and is recommended.

## **BENEFITS AND RISKS**

Therapy can be highly beneficial. Many people make significant changes to their lives with the help of mental health therapy. Benefits can include but are not limited to increased mental and/or physical health, improved relationships, increased experience of pleasant cognitions, emotions, and body sensations, decreased distress, and decreased reliance on maladaptive coping behaviors. Risks might include but are not limited to short-term increases in symptoms or distressing cognitions, emotions, and/or body sensations and/or unpredicted changes to relationship dynamics. Although many people see significant positive changes while in therapy, there is no guarantee of results.

## **ALTERNATIVES TO THERAPY**

Mental health therapy is voluntary. You may choose to receive or not receive treatment from Present Awakenings Therapy Center. An alternative is to engage in therapy with another mental health provider. Additional alternatives could include but are not limited to psychiatric medication, therapeutic and/or support groups, meditation practices, bodywork and/or massage, or acupuncture. You may stop therapy at any time.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The session content and all relevant materials to your treatment will be held confidential unless you request in writing to have all or portions of such content released to a specifically named person(s) or entity. Limitations of confidentiality exist and include:

- *Safety:* If you tell us that you intend to cause serious mental or physical harm to a specifically identifiable victim – including yourself – and we determine that you present a clear and imminent risk of harm, Illinois law requires that we warn the potential victim (if applicable) and the authorities (e.g., police). This means that we may disclose otherwise confidential information for this purpose. Additionally, emergency services and/or support(s) will be notified in the case of a medical emergency or accident. When possible, this will be discussed with you prior to involving anyone else.
- *Abuse:* If you disclose physical, sexual, financial, or psychological abuse or neglect or exploitation of a minor or elderly person, appropriate authorities will be notified. Again, when possible, this will be discussed with you prior to our disclosure to the authorities.
- *Consultation:* To ensure you receive the best possible care, we may seek consultation with other therapists. Some content of your sessions will be shared; however, never will we disclose any of your identifying information in consultations.
- *Legal Requirements:* If a court of law issues a legitimate subpoena, we are required to disclose information stated on the subpoena.
- *Unexpected Owner/Practice Manager's absence:* In the event of an unplanned absence from practice of Stacy Rhoades – the Owner/Practice Manager of Present Awakenings Therapy Center – whether due to injury, illness, death, or any other reason, she maintains a detailed Professional Will with instructions for an Executor to ensure your continued care in accordance with your needs. You authorize the Executor and/or Secondary Executor to access your treatment and financial records and contact you if necessary only in accordance with the terms of the Professional Will and only when there is an event that has caused or is likely to cause the Owner/Practice Manager a significant unplanned absence from practice.

Confidentiality extends not only to what you say to your therapist in sessions and your records, but also to your physical presence. If we see each other accidentally outside of the therapy office, we will not acknowledge you first. Your right to privacy and confidentiality is of the utmost importance to us, and we do not wish to jeopardize your

privacy. However, if you acknowledge us first, we will follow your lead and speak with you briefly. Any therapeutic or practice related matters will be saved for therapy sessions/practice communications.

Please see the HIPAA Notice of Privacy Practices for additional information about required disclosures.

## **IN-PERSON VERSUS TELEHEALTH SESSIONS**

Present Awakenings Therapy Center offers both in-person and telehealth sessions, and both methods have been proven to be effective, including with EMDR therapies and techniques. The decision to meet in-person versus via telehealth will be a collaborative decision between you and your therapist. Many people like telehealth sessions for being able to access therapists or therapy sessions that would not otherwise be accessible for them (for example, seeing a therapist located further than you can reasonably commute or at a time of day that you are not able to spend time commuting), and many people prefer in-person sessions due to being better able to connect with the therapist and their own emotions when in-person. When choosing how to meet, we will prioritize what method will be most beneficial for you. All clients should be able to and prepared to meet both in-person and via telehealth, even if one method has been chosen as the primary method of therapy.

After completing the Intake Assessment, your therapist will provide recommendations for meeting in-person versus via telehealth based on which modality we believe would offer you the best likelihood of meeting your treatment goals. If you are currently engaging in high-risk behaviors, are in a dangerous situation, require high levels of support and intervention, and/or experience significant dissociation, you may be required to engage in in-person sessions. If you have a job or engage in activities that have significant exposure to contagious diseases, you may be required to meet via telehealth. Based on a variety of factors – including home and/or work location(s), insurance reimbursement, health factors, current levels of contagious diseases in the community, your current mental health symptoms, etc. – you or your therapist may determine it is necessary to change between in-person/telehealth. If at any point your therapist believes a change is necessary, they will discuss it with you, and you are encouraged to do the same with your therapist. If you and your therapist cannot agree on how to meet, Present Awakenings Therapy Center will provide you with referrals to other therapists who may be able to meet your preferences.

## **IN-PERSON SESSIONS RISKS AND PROCEDURES**

In-person sessions are offered by Present Awakenings Therapy Center at our office. There is a private waiting room for the office. Please do not arrive more than 10 minutes before your scheduled appointment time.

If you are having sessions in-person, you acknowledge that you are risking exposure to illness and communicable diseases and all that those may entail, both with your interaction in sessions and with travel to/from sessions. You agree you won't hold Present Awakenings Therapy Center or your therapist responsible if you contract any illness or disease. Present Awakenings Therapy Center follows the CDC's guidance and local, state, and federal laws and regulations around communicable diseases; if you are having in-person sessions, you also agree to follow those CDC, local, state, and federal guidance, laws, and regulations. If we ask you to wear a mask in a session for any reason, you agree to do so; if you would like your therapist to wear a mask in a session for any reason, they will do so as well. If either of you or your therapist is experiencing illness or symptoms of COVID-19, the flu, or another communicable disease, the person with the illness or disease will inform the other as soon as possible and switch the session to a telehealth session. If you show up for an appointment and we believe you are exhibiting symptoms COVID-19, the flu, or another communicable disease, we may require you to leave the office immediately. If you are unable to engage in a telehealth session during your scheduled session time and your therapist is unable to accommodate rescheduling your session, the Late Cancellation Fee will apply.

## TELEHEALTH SESSIONS RISKS AND PROCEDURES

Telehealth refers to providing therapy services remotely using technology such as video conferencing. There are both benefits and potential risks with telehealth. The benefits of telehealth services include but are not limited to convenient access to care and the ability to meet from a location of your choice. Research has shown therapy via telehealth to be effective. However, there are potential risks and additional responsibilities to be able to engage in telehealth services. It is important for you to understand the following regarding engaging in telehealth sessions:

- *Technical Competence And Equipment:* Telehealth requires technical competence by both the therapist and client to be effective. You may have to have certain computer or cell phone systems to engage in telehealth services. You are solely responsible for any cost to you to obtain any necessary equipment, accessories, or software to take part in telehealth services. It will be your responsibility to know how to use the device(s) and/or equipment you are connecting to sessions with.
- *Confidentiality:* Since telehealth sessions take place outside of the therapist's office, protecting confidentiality will require effort by both your therapist and you. Present Awakenings Therapy Center and your therapist will take reasonable steps to ensure your privacy and protect all communications that are a part of the telehealth services. However, the nature of electronic communications technologies is such that we cannot guarantee that communications will be kept confidential or that other people may not gain access to communications. We will try to use updated encryption methods, firewalls, and back-up systems to help keep your information private, but there is a risk that electronic communications and/or sessions may be compromised, unsecured, or accessed by others. It will be your responsibility to also take reasonable steps to ensure the security of communications (for example, only using secure networks for telehealth sessions and having passwords to protect the device you use for telehealth). It will also be your responsibility to attend sessions only from a private, confidential space where you will not be interrupted to allow you to protect your confidentiality and be comfortable expressing yourself as you need to. Additionally, you will be responsible for never sharing the link to your session. If another person (such as a support person) is invited into your session via telehealth, a different link will be used.
- *Technology:* Technology issues might impact sessions. For example, technology may stop working during a session, may be intermittent, or be delayed, which can be frustrating and/or interrupt sessions. If the session is interrupted, you cannot connect via the same method that was being used or planned to be used, AND you are NOT having an emergency, wait for your therapist to call you on your cell phone to decide together how to proceed with the session.
- *Efficacy:* Research shows that telehealth is about as effective as in-person psychotherapy. However, some things are not able to be fully experienced when the therapist and client are not in the same room. For example, it is harder to see and understand all the non-verbal communication when working remotely and may require more verbal check-ins and clarification.
- *Appropriateness For Telehealth:* If you are currently engaging in high-risk behaviors, are in a dangerous situation, and/or require high levels of support and intervention, telehealth may not be appropriate for your sessions. If this applies, your therapist will discuss with you whether in-person sessions are more appropriate, and in-person sessions may be required to continue services with Present Awakenings Therapy Center. Before engaging in telehealth, an emergency response plan will be discussed to address any potential crisis situations that may arise during the course of treatment.
- *Emergencies:* To engage in telehealth services, you will need to have an emergency contact on file. You will also need to provide the address of the location where you are at during the session in each session. In the event of an emergency, we will contact your emergency contact and/or emergency services as deemed necessary. If the session is interrupted for any reason (such as the connection fails) AND you are having an

emergency, do NOT call us or attempt to reconnect to the session; instead, call 911 or go to your nearest emergency room. Contact your therapist only after you have called and obtained emergency services.

- *Fees:* The same fee rates will apply for telehealth services as for in-person services. However, insurance may not cover sessions that are conducted via telehealth. If your insurance does not cover telehealth services or stops covering telehealth services, you will be solely responsible for the entire fee of the session. It is your responsibility to contact your insurance company prior to the start of telehealth sessions in order to determine whether your insurance will cover telehealth sessions.
- *No Recording:* Telehealth sessions shall not be video or audio recorded in any way by either the therapist or client unless agreed to in writing by mutual consent. Present Awakenings Therapy Center will maintain a record of your sessions in the same way records are maintained for in-person sessions in accordance with the practice's policies.

### **CREDENTIALS, IN-NETWORK INSURANCES, & RATES**

Your therapist's credentials, which insurances they are in-network with, and their rates can be found in their specific Credentials, In-Network Insurances, & Rates document. To view this information for other Present Awakenings Therapy Center's therapists, please visit: <https://www.presentawakenings.com/>

### **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

If you have any questions or need additional information, we are happy to answer questions and discuss the therapeutic relationship.

Please also see the Practice Policies for additional information regarding your treatment.

**By signing this form, you acknowledge that you are competent, understand this policy, have been provided material information regarding the proposed care and the anticipated risks, benefits, side effects, and alternatives, have been offered ample time and opportunity to discuss your concerns, and all your questions have been answered to your satisfaction. You also agree to your responsibilities as outlined. Thus, you hereby provide your informed consent to receive treatment as described in this document.**

BY CLICKING ON THE CHECKBOX BELOW YOU ARE AGREEING THAT YOU HAVE READ, UNDERSTAND, AND AGREE TO THE ITEMS CONTAINED IN THIS DOCUMENT.

*[DOCUMENT IS SIGNED ELECTRONICALLY VIA CLIENT PORTAL]*