



## AUSTIN PROFESSIONAL — C O U N S E L I N G —

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Once filled out, these forms are to be kept in my office and not to be taken home with you. A signed copy is kept in your file, and you may refer to it whenever you like. Thank you

### **New Client Information and Informed Consent to Treatment**

Welcome! My approach to therapy constitutes a warm, empathic and experiential approach to personal growth work. I consider the holistic interplay between mind and body, and utilize modern techniques derived from regular training with top clinicians in the field. I am open to discussing any aspect of this work before or during sessions, as well as answering any questions you may have about the process. The decision to pursue personal growth and overcome life challenges is an important one. I look forward to a deep and lasting healing relationship with you.

### **The Nature of Therapy**

Therapy can be structured in a short-term format, such as a few months to work on a specific issue, or in a long-term format, such as years spent working on a variety of issues or on persistent core issues. Yet almost all therapy has phases, and managing these properly is important to ensure the most effective course of treatment. Therapy begins with us getting to know each other and making sure it feels like a good match. A good match is so important to therapy that I will not hesitate to refer to others out of respect for this process being of the most benefit to you. It is also sometimes advisable to refer to specialists in certain sub-areas of counseling.

Once we establish a good match, we will set goals, explore your history, and set the foundation for our work together. We will then launch into the core of the work, which consists of understanding issues, processing them and integrating changes. There may be times in this process where you feel the desire to discontinue treatment. It is important to discuss these feelings with me so we can explore them, because the impulse to interrupt treatment sometimes arises from natural resistance to change, and sometimes just before important breakthroughs. Some clients may discontinue treatment prematurely out of a sense that things have changed enough, but it can be easy to return to old habits without further integration.

Occasionally, a therapy session may leave you feeling worse than when you walked in. This is because therapy is hard work, and sometimes we are engaging challenging material than can bring uncomfortable thoughts or feelings to the surface. Learning how to handle difficult emotions and challenging times is part of therapy. Good therapy will challenge you at times, ask you to grow

in response and trust your resilience to keep going. Our therapeutic relationship should also be able to handle ups and downs, disappointments and successes. Navigating these aspects of our deepening relationship is also a part of growth and developing relating skills.

The final phase of therapy consists of feeling when the desired changes have enough support to transition out of therapy. We will likely decrease the frequency of sessions for a time rather than stop cold. **It is important that the transition out of therapy be an open discussion between us, as the nature of the transition can help integrate the work we have done and carry it into the future.** When our time in therapy ends, know that you are always welcome to contact me if you feel a need to do more work in the future. Couples are welcome to call whenever support sessions are needed.

### **How Therapy Works**

Therapy works through a variety of means, but primarily through a combination of the nature of our relationship, your motivation to work toward change, my therapeutic knowledge and skill, insights you gain about yourself and new behaviors we practice in session. I incorporate various styles of learning, such as conversational, exploring feelings, getting to know the body, and helping the nervous system integrate changes. I use active learning methods such as role-playing, exercises and certain ways of developing greater emotional tolerance. The research shows that practicing new reactions and behaviors in session rather than just talking about issues leads to lasting change.

I am very transparent as a therapist and happy to explain my approach and methods at any time. My methods may not always be what they seem, however, so please ask if you have questions. I may sometimes challenge a particular partner in a relationship more than the other for a few sessions. This is not because I favor one partner more than another. Sometimes, one person holds more of the keys to opening or resolving a particular issue at the time. I may say things for effect at times, not necessarily because I believe them to be true, but to stimulate a response I feel will be helpful to the therapy.

One of the most powerful aspects of therapeutic work is practicing being in the here-and-now and noticing any obstacles we have to true relationship and being fully present to ourselves. Often, accepting ourselves before we have even changed anything can help solidify positive psychological change. A daily practice, whether individual or relational, can be a powerful force to support therapy. I often assign “homework” to carry the work we are doing into the week. Clients are welcome to ask about personal contemplative practices that are increasingly being shown to have positive mental health benefits.

Interestingly, research on the benefits of psychotherapy show that the most important factors for healing and change are not specific techniques, such as this or that kind of therapy, but rather more personal aspects involving the client and the therapist. The single best predictor of therapeutic change is the quality of the client-therapist relationship. That is why a good match between client and therapist is important. The second greatest factor in therapeutic benefit is how seriously you approach your own personal growth work and the investment/energy you put into it as a client. The third major factor is the person and presence of the therapist, meaning who they are and *how they are* more than what specific methods they use. Research in neurobiology suggests that the intuitive way a therapist responds to clients is significant, and that this can vary

depending on the therapist's comfort with their own selves and issues. All of this highlights the importance of a therapist being engaged in his or her own personal growth work, something I continually pursue and embrace.

### **Multicultural Awareness Statement**

I come from a diverse cultural background, have lived in and trained in several countries, and make it a point to create an open, safe, multi-culturally aware space for us to understand one another. I speak several languages, and keep an open mind with regard to cultural differences. **I have specific training in diversity awareness and welcome clients of many races, ethnicities, religions, sexual orientations and political views.**

### **Confidentiality**

Confidentiality is very important to creating a safe and trusting environment where you can feel open to discuss your most sensitive thoughts and issues. I regard the information you share with me with the greatest respect. Everything we discuss, including the fact that you are a client, is private and confidential information and is not shared with anyone. If I consult with another professional regarding clients I am working with, I do so in a way that obscures identifying information. One exception is my ability to communicate with doctors and other therapists you may be seeing. I ask for your permission and agreement now to allow me to communicate with those professionals if it seems appropriate. These individuals are also ethically required to maintain your confidentiality, and any consultations or conversations will be held in private.

Texas state law mandates these additional **exceptions** to our confidentiality: **1)** If I suspect a child is being abused or is in danger; **2)** If you are a minor, elderly or disabled person, and you divulge information indicating that you have been a victim of abuse, or you divulge information about another such person who is the victim of abuse; **3)** In the unlikely event that my records are subpoenaed by a court of law, such as in child abuse or a child custody suit. In addition, Texas state law allows these additional exceptions to confidentiality: **4)** If I suspect you are a danger to yourself or someone else; and **5)** If you file a suit or complaint against me, I may disclose relevant information from my records in my defense.

I office with a group of independently practicing mental health professionals. While they and I may occasionally form a treatment team, I am completely independent in providing you with services. My professional records are separately maintained and are not shared or available to others who work in this office except when, in addition to seeing me, you also see those professionals for therapy. Certain identifying information is also shared with our office manager and my executive assistant, either of who may at times contact you regarding payment, scheduling or insurance information.

### **Appointments, Fees, & Payments**

Generally, appointments are scheduled on a weekly or every-other-week basis. However, they may be scheduled more or less frequently depending on your preferences and my suggestions. If you decide to change a scheduled appointment, please contact me at least 48 hrs in advance so that I will have the opportunity to reschedule that time. You will be charged for appointments that

are not canceled at least 24 hours in advance, as that time has been reserved for you. Exceptions are made for illnesses such as colds and flus or unexpected emergencies. If you are sick, please do not come to session, even if you have to cancel on short notice. I ask my clients to cancel sessions, even on short notice, if you are within 48hrs of having had a fever or of flu symptoms. **The fee per session for individual therapy is \$200 for 45 minutes and \$250 for one hour. Couples counseling sessions are \$250 for 45 minutes. \$300 for one hour and \$400 for 90 minutes.** You may pay by check, cash or credit card and payment is collected at the time of your appt. Rates are subject to change with 60 days notice. I only accept very limited forms of insurance, however I can provide you with a detailed receipt should you choose to seek reimbursement for out-of-network benefits. Should you fall behind in payment by more than one session, our work will need to be suspended until the bill is paid, as I consider it unethical for therapists to allow clients to accumulate significant debt regarding therapy.

### **Group Therapy**

Our location is known for group therapy offering the highest standards and research-based models that make for effective groups. Group is an ideal place to work on improving communication, developing greater empathy and emotional intelligence, sharing feelings, exploring how you present yourself and react to others, how authentic you allow yourself to be, and how to form deep, meaningful connections. Our guided groups consist of 7-14 members and meet every week at the same day and time. Group is a powerful and relatively inexpensive way to engage in regular therapy, and has the added value of holding you accountable to your personal growth goals through the bonding between group members. **Group therapy is billed at a rate of \$50 per week during the time you are in the group, regardless of attendance.** I bill monthly for group at the beginning of each month for the previous month.

### **Couples Therapy**

**When I work you as a couple, I will always see you together unless prior arrangements are made for combining our couples work with individual counseling with one or both of you.** If your partner is unable to make a couples appointment last minute, I will only see you alone if we have discussed it at a previous couples appointment and all parties, including myself, are comfortable with it. In other words, don't come alone if your partner can't make it or will be significantly late, unless we have prior discussion and agreement that meeting individually with one or both of you could be helpful to our work.

Combining couples therapy with individual counseling for one or both partners is left to the choice and preference of the clinician, and requires an initial discussion to explore any potential conflicts. I am open to doing both in conjunction, but not unless we have discussed it and agreed it will be helpful. Combining couples and individual therapy is different than my doing an occasional individual session with both partners that I see as a couple. Those occasional individual sessions I may request to have with both partners I see as a couple are still considered part of the couples therapy and do not constitute a change to individual therapy.

Please include your partner in communications to me whenever possible. For example, when you send me an email, please cc your partner. If you leave me a voicemail, please share any information you gave me with your partner. I want to make sure all parties have equal access to me and have the same information of anything we discuss. When seeing two people in

relationship, I do not keep secrets one partner tells me from the other partner, even if the information is shared in an individual session. Any information shared by either partner is to be discussed in our joint sessions. If you provide me with information your partner does not know about, I will support you in sharing it with him or her in a reasonable timeframe. In most circumstances, I will ask that your partner be informed of the private information as soon as possible, usually within 2 sessions. I typically do not reveal any such information to your partner directly, but I may request that we cease therapy if the information is not shared in a timely manner.

### **Scope of Couples Therapy Practice**

I have advanced specific training in couples therapy at the national level, many years of experience working with couples, and serve as an educator and trainer to couples therapists across the U.S. As a result, I am often called upon to handle difficult and complex cases, or to see a couple that has already seen several other couples therapists. While I am capable of supporting a couple in almost any circumstance, my practice is focused on working with couples within a more defined set of criteria, described below.

My work is best suited to couples who know they want to be together and plan to stay together for the long term. While I have no issues with short-term relationships, and I understand that couples wanting to separate need support as well, **my work is focused on the use of adult attachment principles and exercises designed to foster closeness and build intimacy and connection.** As a result, my approach to couples work is typically not the best fit for couples wanting to separate or get divorced. Partners who wish to come in specifically to receive help separating from their partner will likely be better served by a therapist who focuses in that area. There are several therapists who specialize in separations, divorce and co-parenting that I refer to.

While my strengths are in helping you have a happier, more connected relationship, and I primarily see couples that have the intention of staying together, I understand that therapy and relationships can sometimes take unexpected turns. If our work turns toward a decision to separate or divorce, we still have the option to work together during that phase, but we will need to discuss it and all agree that therapy with me can still support that phase of the work. I do occasionally help couples separate as gracefully as possible, and have the expertise and experience to support you regardless of where our sessions go. I am also very dedicated to supporting children who may be involved in a separation or divorce, and our conversations may include how to protect their mental and emotional development and well-being from the stress of such events.

**My work with couples is oriented to relationships in which both partners have a desire and motivation to work on the relationship, explore their own contributions and patterns, and engage in rigorous personal growth work.** Couples therapy tends to not be helpful when partners come in with the intent to blame one another or in an attempt to get the therapist to agree with one person against the other. In addition, couples therapy is contraindicated in certain situations such as the presence of abuse or abusive language and tendencies, threats, domestic violence, danger or perceived danger to either partner, and highly dysfunctional interaction patterns in or outside of the therapy setting. **My approach to couples therapy is not the best fit for couples in which one or both partners have an aversion to therapy, personal growth work, and/or working on the relationship to improve it.** In any of those circumstances, I am happy to refer a couple to several qualified providers who orient their

practices to support couples under those conditions. Even when couples meet the criteria that would make them a good fit for my approach to building a more loving, connected relationship, we must still determine that we are all a good fit in order to pursue couples therapy together.

I am happy to work with polyamorous, open and non-monogamous couples and do not judge couples based on their lifestyle preferences. I have years of experience supporting couples in a great variety of lifestyle choices, including those listed above. I am a sex-positive, kink-aware therapist, and our discussions about sex, sexual preferences, or lifestyle choices can take whatever course they need to in a supportive environment. I see many couples while they are still dating, and offer robust pre-marital counseling to couples who are engaged. I see gay and lesbian couples as clients and do not discriminate on the basis of sexual orientation. I am very comfortable working with same-sex couples, and apply the same science-based, attachment and neuroscience principles with all the couples I work with.

Please be advised that I do not participate in out-of-the-office legal proceedings such as divorce or custody cases and will not serve as a character witness in support of one partner. If you are seeking support from a therapist for a legal case or custody negotiation, I recommend seeking out a therapist who is willing to offer you support in such situations and is able to negotiate the demands of those activities.

#### **Four couples with young children:**

**It is important that you arrange childcare for your session times and not bring your children to couples therapy.** Young children are not allowed in the room while we are working as they are exposed to hearing things that are typically best discussed among adults in private. Infants, while less susceptible to understanding conversation content, can nonetheless be distracting to the important focus needed for couples therapy. Our waiting room is not set up to accommodate children waiting by themselves. If a childcare issue arises, simply cancel your appointment, even on short notice.

#### **Videotaping for Couples**

Depending on the season and what advanced trainings I may be engaged in, I may ask for permission to videotape couples sessions. Permission is optional. Videotaping can enhance our work in several ways. It allows me an opportunity to engage in high-level mentorship from some of the world's top couples therapists, and to get another expert's opinion and insights into a couples dynamic. I occasionally select a 10-minute clip from across a large number of sessions to show in small training groups comprised only of other couples therapists bound by strict standards of confidentiality. Rules are in place to prevent any therapist from viewing a video clip of persons known to the therapist. Videos are only kept by me and are subject to the same record storage requirements as paper records. They are destroyed within three months and never kept beyond that window of time.

I may occasionally use video as a tool to help you have more awareness of your interactions with one another. Sometimes, we are not aware of our body language or tone and it can help to watch our selves while we explore what we were thinking and feeling during those clips. Video, when used in this way, can help generate important understandings about our selves and one another and how we interact in relationship.

Videos are only ever viewed by myself, occasionally you as client(s), and any consulting mentors or small training groups I train with. My training groups are outside of the state of Texas and are comprised of a small number of highly experienced couples therapists from cities around the U.S. All of my mentors and colleagues in such trainings are mental health professionals required to maintain strict standards of privacy and confidentiality. Names and identifying information of clients are never given. I appreciate your willingness to help me continue to deepen my skillset and experience as a couples therapist. The video consent forms I may provide you with establish the permission you are willing to give me to use video in support of our work.

### **Scheduling**

I use an online scheduler, which means it is your responsibility to schedule appointments to ensure we have regular, consistent appointment times in which to move coherently toward your goals. **I am happy to weigh in on what seems a reasonable meeting schedule in order to achieve your therapy objectives. You are responsible for booking your own appointments ahead of time enough to ensure you have the spots you need on my schedule.** If you only wish to see me occasionally, that is fine and there is no requirement as to the frequency of sessions. My schedule typically runs fairly full, so please book ahead for the times you want. The online scheduler allows appointment times to be booked 3 months out.

Your therapeutic work is important, and should my schedule not offer the availability you need, I have associates who work with me who may have greater scheduling availability to see you. I am always prepared to support you in the continuity of your work, which at times may mean referring you to other professionals with greater availability. Please let me know if you are unable to schedule the times you feel you need to support yourself and your personal growth work and we will discuss it. If you need to be seen during evening times, early morning times, or weekends, or if your schedule changes after we begin seeing one another, I do not offer appointment times during those windows, but can refer you to one of my associates who offers those times.

Due to demand, I am unable to continue working with clients that exhibit a pattern of cancelling scheduled sessions on short notice or fail to show up to sessions. Should such a pattern occur, we will discuss it, and I may decide that our schedules are not aligning enough to be able to effectively do therapy work. In such a circumstance, I will refer you to therapists I trust who may have greater scheduling flexibility.

### **Specialists & Referrals**

Sometimes our work reveals the potential benefits of working with a specialist in a particular area outside the scope of my practice. Examples may include treatment for active eating disorders, extensive unresolved or active trauma, or ongoing substance abuse. I may recommend outside testing or assessments such as neuropsychological assessments, cognitive testing, medical checkups and learning disorder assessments. I may recommend a psychiatric assessment to better understand or rule out mental and emotional illnesses, or to support our work together in a phase of self-harm or self-danger. We may discuss medication as an adjunct to therapy. In rare cases, I may recommend hospitalization or residential care, and may be required to call 911 if I believe you may be a danger to yourself or require such additional support. In almost all cases, we will discuss any of the above if they seem important to meeting your goals, and may choose to involve close

family members in decision making or assisting in supporting certain situations. **Should I sense that a specialist could best support an area of our work and provide you with greater accuracy and treatment on a specific issue, I will recommend a specialist be added to our continued work together or refer you to work in a more focused manner on that issue.**

I occasionally travel to teach, support trainings in other cities, or attend retreats and educational conferences. Some of these trips can last up to two weeks at a time and I am generally unavailable to talk by phone or to answer emails when I am away. Although I am in Austin most of the year, you should be aware that such trips could interrupt treatment for a number of weeks. If you have any concerns about such an interruption, please bring them to my attention so that I can recommend a therapist for you to see while I am out of town. My associates are typically available to respond to any concerns or to see you while I am out of town.

### **Miscellaneous**

Should you become sick with a cold, flu, or any other contagious illness, I ask that you cancel our appointment as soon as possible. With two young children at home, and due to the deep and intense nature of the work, I prefer that you cancel our session—even on short notice—than come in such a circumstance. In fact I prefer we cancel our session if you are within 48hrs of having had a fever or any flu symptoms. Therapy is tiring and takes resources and I want to make sure you are feeling well before we dive into the work.

Although Austin is a large and vibrant city, it can also feel like a small town, and it is not uncommon that we may run into each other around town. If that happens, I will likely avoid acknowledging you so that you may choose your own level of privacy. You are welcome to say hello, and if you do, I am happy to return the greeting, but if you prefer not to, that is understood and is not considered impolite.

I occasionally write notes to myself on a given session. These are not part of the permanent record and may be shredded at any time. These notes help me track our work from session to session and are separate from formal therapy notes.

### **Emergencies**

**Due to the nature of my practice, I am not set up to respond immediately to crises. Should a crisis arise that requires immediate attention, please call 911 or the mental hotline at 512-472-HELP (4357).** This hotline is staffed by licensed counselors 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Callers receive “immediate assessments, crisis intervention services if needed and referral to additional community resources. If the caller is in imminent danger, a staff member will contact 911.” You may also dial 211 to learn about community resources available for various concerns and emergencies. I take many trips throughout the year to teach and attend conferences. When I am out of town I am generally unreachable, unless prior arrangements are made.



## **Informed Consent**

I understand that psychotherapy can be a powerful experience with the potential to dramatically alter mental and emotional states. I understand that psychotherapy is an approach to personal growth that is meant to complement, not replace, licensed medical care when such care is needed. I agree that I will seek the help of medical professionals if my needs go beyond the scope of psychotherapy. I acknowledge that I have informed John Howard of any past, present or potential acute medical and/or psychological disorders I may know of, and/or that could arise in session.

Advice John may give is not to be construed as medical advice, nor as a directive to engage in particular behavior. While John may consult with other professionals as a part of his work, and may encourage exploration of certain avenues of treatment, I understand that any decisions I make regarding medication, lifestyle choices, treatment, health issues, medical issues, medical and/or mental health care, etc., remain and must be my own, and made—when appropriate—in concert with licensed medical professionals.

It can sometimes support a counseling session for the therapist to touch certain non-private parts of the body. This is optional, and although John will generally ask for permission when he feels such support is helpful, I agree to openly discuss with John any discomfort or potential issues I may have with such contact. In fact, if I feel uncomfortable with any aspect of our work during the time I am seeing John, I agree to let him know so that he can cooperate fully in respecting my concerns. I acknowledge that I have permission at any time to ask to stop the session and/or treatment, and John will immediately respect my request to do so.

Your signature below indicates that you have read and understood the information presented in this document and are consenting to these policies.

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Both Client Printed Names

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Both Client Signatures

Date