



Samaritan Center of Puget Sound Agreement For Collaterals

Introduction

Thank you for accepting the invitation to assist in _____'s psychotherapeutic treatment. Your participation is important, and is sometimes essential to the success of the treatment. 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 contact is usually a spouse, family member, or friend who participates in therapy to assist the identified client. The collateral is not considered to be a patient and is not the subject of the treatment. Psychotherapists have certain legal and ethical responsibilities to their clients, and the privacy of the relationship is given legal protection. Samaritan Center therapists have a primary responsibility to their clients, and they must place their clients' interests first. When the client is an individual child or adolescent, it is also true that the therapist works in the interests of the client, and the therapist interacts with the caregivers as collaterals.

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 client, to provide information to the therapist, and never attend another session. In another case, a collateral might attend all of the client's therapy sessions, and his/her relationship with the client may be a focus of the treatment. When the client is your child or adolescent, it is important that the therapist discuss with you your role in order to establish and maintain proper boundaries. Regardless of your relationship to the client, you will discuss your specific role with the therapist at your first meeting, and at other appropriate times throughout the course of treatment.

Medical Records

No record or chart will be maintained on you in your role as a collateral. Notes about you may be entered into the identified client's chart. The client has a right to access the chart and the material contained therein. In rare situations it might be possible to maintain the privacy of your communications with the therapist. If that is your wish, this should be discussed before any information is communicated. Unless the client is a minor under 13 years old and you are a legal caregiver, you have no right to access the client's chart without the client's 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 the client's professional services unless you are financially responsible for the client.

Confidentiality

Both federal and state law protects the confidentiality of information in the client's chart, including the information that you provide. It can only be released if the identified client specifically authorizes their therapist to do so, or unless a specific exceptions to this general rule applies. (You are expected to maintain the confidentiality of the identified client (your partner, friend, or child) in your role as a collateral.

Do Collaterals Ever Become a Formal Client?

Collaterals may discuss themselves in therapy, especially when their own circumstances interact with the issues of the identified client. The therapist may recommend formal therapy for a collateral. Below are some examples of when this might occur:

- It becomes evident that a collateral is in need of mental health services. In this circumstance, the collateral needs to have a clinician, diagnosis, and chart records kept.
- Parents, being seen as collaterals while their child is being treated, are determined to need couples therapy improve their relationship so they can function effectively as parents.

Most often in these situations, but not always, the therapist will refer you to another clinician for treatment. There are two reasons that the referral may be necessary:

- Seeing two members of the same family, or close friends, may result in a dual role, which can potentially cloud the therapist's judgment. Making a referral helps prevent this from happening.
- The therapist must maintain focus on the original primary goals of treatment for the identified client. For example, if the therapist started treating a child's behavioral problems, the original focus of therapy can be lost if the therapist becomes focused on another's goals. A referral helps the therapist to stay focused.

Release of Information

The identified client is not required to sign an authorization to release information (Authorization Form) to the collateral when the client invites a collateral to participate in their therapy. The presence of the collateral with the consent of the client is adequate. However, a signed Authorization Form provides some assurance that full consent has been given to the therapist for the client's confidential information to be discussed with the collateral in therapy. The Authorization Form is also helpful to the therapist on those occasions when receiving a telephone call from a collateral or when the therapist calls a collateral for one reason or another. In most instances, the therapist cannot provide any information about the client to a collateral without a signed Authorization Form from the client.

Parents as Collaterals

Therapists 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 client is not a minor.

In treatment involving children and their parents, access to information is an important and sometimes contentious topic. Particularly for older children, trust and privacy are crucial to treatment success. However, parents also need to know certain information about the treatment. For this reason, it is important to discuss with the therapist and agree about what information will be shared and what information will remain private. In general, it is important to remain in close communication about treatment goals and progress. In addition, it is helpful for the therapist to receive updates on what is happening in the child's life, at home or in school. Regarding safety, your child's therapist will always inform you if they believe that your child is in danger or if he/she is endangering others. One of the therapist's primary tasks at the onset is to discuss and agree on shared definition of dangerousness, which will help provide clarity about what will be disclosed.

If you are participating in your child's therapy, you should expect the therapist to request that you examine your own attitudes and behaviors in order to determine if you can make positive changes that will be of benefit to your child.

Summary

If you have questions about therapy, the therapist's procedures, or your role in this process, please discuss them with the therapist. Remember that the best way to assure quality and ethical treatment is to keep communication open and direct with the therapist. By signing below, you indicate that you have read and understand this document.

Collateral Signature

Date

Collateral Printed Name