

Megan Matthews, LISW

Policies and Procedures

Welcome! This document contains important information about my professional services and business policies and provides a framework for understanding the services you are considering. Please read it carefully and note any questions you might have. We can discuss your questions at your next appointment, after you have had an opportunity to review this information.

Psychotherapy Services

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the training of the therapist, the personalities of both the therapist and client, and the particular problems the client brings forward. There are many different methods I may use to deal with the problems that you hope to address. Psychotherapy calls for a very active effort on your part. For the therapy to be most successful, it will be in your best interest to work on things we talk about both during our sessions and at home.

Therapy can have risks as well as benefits. 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 unsettling and occasionally disruptive to the relationships you already have. It is important that you consider carefully whether these risks are worth the potential benefits to you of attaining your goals in seeking help. Most people who take these risks find that therapy is helpful. Therapy often leads to better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress.

Our work together will begin with an evaluation of your goals and needs. At this point, I will be able to offer you some first impressions about what our work might include and an initial approach if you decide to continue with therapy. You should evaluate this information in light of your own opinions and preferences. Therapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should be mindful when choosing a therapist. If you have questions or concerns about our work together, we should discuss them whenever they arise. If you continue to have doubts, I would be happy to assist you in setting up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion.

My Background and Training

I am a Licensed Independent Social Worker in the State of Iowa and maintain a private psychotherapy practice in Iowa City, Iowa. I graduated from the Master of Social Work program at the University of Iowa in 2009. I am also a HeartMath Practitioner, a EFT Practitioner, and a Reiki practitioner. In addition to my work at Eastwind Healing Center, I am the co-founder of *Creative Transformations: Integrated Approaches to Healing*, where I facilitate workshops integrating the creative and healing arts.

My approach to our work together is grounded in my belief that the potential for transformation and healing is present within all people. I view my role as one of supporting you in discovering and developing your own power to create a life of meaning, joy, and satisfaction. In my experience, emotional healing and growth are best served with a holistic approach that involves the mind, body, and spirit. I consider therapy to be a collaborative endeavor and therefore, my approach is *always* guided by your unique needs, experiences, desires, and goals. My intent is to provide you with strategies and tools that can be easily integrated into your daily routines to enhance your experience of overall well-being and satisfaction with life.

My areas of specialization include anxiety, depression, stress management, trauma and loss, issues related to pregnancy and parenting, divorce adjustment and step-parenting. I also work with children and adolescents on issues such as anxiety, family relationships, divorce adjustment and blended families, and grief, loss & trauma.

My Approach to Psychotherapy

Our work together is likely to include some or all of the following: dialogue, goal-setting, problem-solving, exploration of how your current concerns relate to your earlier experiences, stress-reduction techniques, and a review of your experiences since the last session as they pertain to your therapeutic goals. I may suggest that you consult with a medical professional or other specialist to work in conjunction with the services I provide. If another specialist is working with you, I may request a release of information from you so that I can coordinate with that person about your care. *You have the right to refuse anything I might suggest.*

Energy Psychology (EFT). In addition to the more conventional methods listed previously, I utilize an approach known as energy psychology. The roots of energy psychology trace back to Eastern healing practices that work with the acupuncture points and the body's energy systems. The method usually involves having you tap with your fingers on specific points on the face and torso while bringing to mind a troublesome experience or pattern you would like to change. EFT, or "tapping" as it is sometimes called, is believed to shift the brain's chemistry in ways that support change. Studies using MRI technology suggest that tapping on acupuncture points stimulates the areas of the brain which store emotional memories and mediate our response to stress, while also releasing endorphins which calms the stress response and creates a sense of improved well-being.

HeartMath. HeartMath is a heart-focused mindfulness practice designed to create a harmonious mind-body state in which the heart, brain and other physiological systems are in sync. When these systems are in sync, the result is a state of emotional, mental, and physical well-being. Research has shown that the practice of HeartMath is effective in reducing stress, treating a range of emotional issues such as anxiety, anger, and depression, and managing stress-related physical complaints, including high blood pressure, insomnia and chronic pain.

Meetings

I generally schedule one appointment of 60 minutes duration per week. Sessions may also, by prior agreement, be shorter, more frequent, or less frequent. As a general rule, as treatment progresses and improvements are made and sustained, treatment frequency will decrease to every other week. If positive changes continue to be sustained for several weeks, we will schedule one final check-in appointment 30 days later and then end our work together.

Termination

One of my policies is to support you any time you make the choice to end services. When you are ready to leave, I would like to help you make this transition comfortably and easily. Several weeks advance notice is helpful in this process. When ending services this way, it often turns out to be the most productive time in therapy for clients. Even when you are not able to give me advance notice, I will still do my best to help you transition easily.

Professional Records

I keep brief records of each session, primarily noting the date of the session, the topics discussed, the interventions used, and progress or obstacles observed as they relate to your goals. You have a right to a copy of these records at any time. You also have the right to request a Release of Information to release these records to any other health-care provider. I maintain your records in a secure location that cannot be accessed by anyone else.

Confidentiality

With the exception of special situations described below, you have the absolute right to confidentiality regarding your work with me. I will not share information about you with any third-party, without your prior written consent. I will always act to protect your privacy to the best of my ability. You may direct me to share information with whomever you choose, and you may also change your mind and revoke that permission at any time. You may request anyone you wish to attend a therapy session with you.

If you elect to communicate with me via email, please be advised that email is not completely confidential due to the fact that all emails are retained in the logs of your and my Internet service providers. Although under normal circumstances no one looks at these logs, they are, in theory, available to be read by system administrators of the Internet service provider.

Here are the exceptions to your right to confidentiality:

There are some situations in which I am legally obligated to take action to protect the client or others from harm. By law, I am required to report suspected abuse of a child, elderly or disabled person to the appropriate state protective agency. In addition, if I believe an individual is threatening serious bodily harm to another, I am required to take protective action by notifying the potential victim and law enforcement officials. Finally, if I believe you are in imminent danger of harming

yourself, I am required to contact a family member or other support person or the police.

Although this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, please feel free to discuss any questions or concerns you may have about these rare exceptions to confidentiality.

Minors

If you are under 18 years of age, please be aware that the law may provide your parents or legal guardians the right to examine your treatment records. Aside from this situation, it is my policy to provide parents or guardians with only general information about our work together, unless I feel there is a high risk you will harm yourself or someone else. In this case, I will notify them of my concern. I will also provide them with a general summary of your treatment when it is complete. Before giving them any information, I will discuss the matter with you, if possible, and do my best to handle any objections you may have about what I am planning to discuss.

Billing and Payments

You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise or unless you have insurance, in which case I will first bill your insurance company. 24 hours advance notice of cancellation is required. If you miss a session or cancel a session with less than 24 hours notice, you will be charged a \$85 missed appointment fee. If you experience a sudden illness or emergency, you will not be charged for the missed session.

Contacting Me

I am often with a client or otherwise not immediately available by telephone. When I am unavailable, you may speak with the receptionist or leave a message on my voice mail. You may also contact me via email. I will make every effort to return your call or email on the same day, with the exception of weekends and holidays. If you are unable to reach me and feel that you can't wait for me to return your call, contact your family physician. If it is after hours, please call your local hospital and ask to speak with the psychologist or psychiatrist on call. If you believe you are in imminent danger of harming yourself, please call 911 or go to the emergency room at the nearest hospital and ask for the psychiatrist or psychologist on call.

Other Aspects of Our Relationship

I welcome your questions. You have the right to ask me questions about anything that happens in our work together. I'm always willing to discuss how and why I've decided to do what I am doing, and to look at alternatives that might work better. You can feel free to ask me to try something you think will be helpful. Please talk with me about any concerns you have about your treatment. I will take such concerns seriously and meet them with care and respect.

Contacts Outside Our Work Together. My professional code of ethics requires that I avoid social and business relationships with clients. Our work together is most

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effective when kept free from possible outside entanglements. From time to time, we may encounter each other outside of the office setting. In these situations, in order to protect your confidentiality, I will avoid greeting you unless you acknowledge me first.

Vacations. I am away from the office several times each year for vacations or to attend professional meetings. In case of lengthy absences, I will tell you well ahead of time and give you the name and contact information for the therapist who will be covering my practice during my absence.

It is my desire for you to be pleased with our work together and to feel that it has assisted you in achieving your goals in life.