

# **Jean-Frederic Abouardham, M.Eng., Ph.D.**

Psychologist - License # PSY 16950

(650) 224-0085

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[www.abouardham.com](http://www.abouardham.com)

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## **OUTPATIENT SERVICES CONTRACT**

Welcome to my practice. This document contains important information about my professional services and business policies. Please read it carefully and jot down any questions you might have so that we can discuss them at our next meeting. After you sign it, it will represent an agreement between us.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES**

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the psychologist and patient, the particular issues addressed, and the different methods used to address them. Psychotherapy is not like a medical doctor visit. It calls for a very real effort on your part, and, for it to be most successful, you will have to actively participate both during our sessions and between them.

Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves discussing unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings such as sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, or helplessness, both during and after a session. On the other hand, psychotherapy has also been shown to meaningfully improve the lives of people who work through it. Therapy often leads to better self-image and relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. There are no guarantees, however, of what your personal experience will be.

Therapy requires a commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should select your therapist carefully. During our first 2 to 4 sessions, we will evaluate your needs. I will then offer you some suggestions of what our work should include and a treatment plan to follow, if you decide to continue with therapy. You should evaluate this information along with your own impression regarding working with me. 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.

### **MEETINGS**

If we start working together, I will usually schedule one 50-minute session per week at a time we agree on, although some sessions may be longer or more frequent. A "one and a half" session will last 75 minutes, and a "double session" will last one hour and 40 minutes. Once an appointment hour is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide 24 hours advance notice of cancellation or unless we both agree otherwise. When it is possible, I recommend to reschedule the appointment.

### **PROFESSIONAL FEES**

My hourly (50 minutes) fee is \$170. In addition to weekly appointments, I charge this amount for other professional services you may need, though I will break down the hourly cost if I work for periods of less than one hour. These services may include telephone conversations lasting longer than five minutes, attendance at meetings with other professionals you have authorized, preparation of records or treatment summaries, report writing, and the time spent performing any other service you may request of me. If you become involved in legal proceedings that require my participation, you will be expected to pay for my professional time even if I am called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement, I charge \$250 per 50-minute hour for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding.

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## **BILLING AND PAYMENTS**

You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to when they are requested. In some unusual circumstances, I may be willing to negotiate a fee adjustment or payment installment plan.

If your account has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements have not been agreed upon, I have the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may involve hiring a collection agency or going through small claims court. The collection costs will be added to the claim, and the only information I release are patient's name and address, nature of services provided, and amount due.

## **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 your treatment. If you have a health insurance policy, it will usually provide some coverage for mental health treatment. I will fill out forms and 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 essential that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers by carefully reading the section in your insurance coverage booklet that describes these services or by calling your plan administrator. Of course I will be happy to help you in understanding the information you receive from your insurance company. If it is necessary to clear confusion, I will be willing to call the company on your behalf.

"Managed Health Care" plans such as HMOs and PPOs often require authorization before they provide reimbursement for mental health services and are often limited to short-term treatment approaches designed to work out specific problems interfering 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 patients feel that they need more services after insurance benefits end. Some managed-care plans will not allow me to provide services to you once your benefits end. If this is the case, I will do my best to find another provider for you to continue your psychotherapy.

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 clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or, in rare cases, copies of the entire record. This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored in a computer. Though all insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, I have no control over what they do with it. In some cases, they may share the information with a national medical information databank. I will provide you with a copy of any report I submit, if you request it. 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.

## **CONTACTING ME**

While I can usually be reached directly by phone from 8 AM until 10 PM, I will not answer calls when I am with a patient or in any other professional meeting. An unanswered call is redirected to a confidential

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voice mail system that I monitor frequently. I will make every effort to return your call on the same day, generally within a few hours. If you are difficult to reach, please leave specific information regarding when and where I can reach you. Use the paging option to indicate urgency, and your call should be returned right away. Please, limit the use of this option to the appropriate circumstances. If you are unable to reach me directly and feel that you can't wait for me to return your call, contact your family physician or the nearest emergency room and ask for the psychologist/psychiatrist on call. If I have to be unavailable for an extended time, I will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact, if necessary.

## **PROFESSIONAL RECORDS**

The laws and standards of my profession require that I keep treatment records. You are entitled to receive a copy of your 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. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. I recommend that you review them in my presence so that we can discuss the contents. Patients will be charged an appropriate fee for any time spent in preparing information requests.

## **MINORS**

If you are under eighteen years of age, please be aware that the law may provide your parents the right to examine your treatment records. It is my policy to request an agreement from parents that they agree to give up access to your records. If they agree, I will provide them only with general information about our work together, unless I feel there is a high risk that you will seriously harm yourself or someone else. In this case, I will notify them of my concern. I will also provide them with a 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 with what I am prepared to discuss.

## **CONFIDENTIALITY**

Overall, the privacy of all communications between a patient and a psychologist is protected by law, and I can release information about our work to others only with your written permission. There are, however, a few exceptions.

In most legal proceedings, you have the right to prevent me from providing any information about your treatment. In some proceedings involving child custody and those in which your emotional condition is an important issue, a judge may order my testimony and/or the release of records if he/she determines that the case justifies it.

There are some situations in which I am legally obligated to take action to protect others from harm, even if I have to reveal some information about a patient's identity. For example, if I believe that a child, an elderly person, or a disabled person is being abused, I must file a report with the appropriate state agency.

If I believe that a patient is threatening serious bodily harm to an identifiable person or serious damage to property, I am required to take protective actions. These actions may include notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, and/or seeking hospitalization for the patient. If the patient threatens to harm himself/herself, I may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her and/or to contact family

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members or others who can help provide protection. These situations have rarely occurred in my practice, and I would make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action.

I may occasionally find it helpful to consult other professionals about a case, and I avoid disclosing any identifying details. The consultant is also legally bound to keep any information confidential. If you don't object, I will not tell you about these consultations unless I feel that it is important to our work together.

While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important that we discuss any questions or concerns that you may have at our next meeting. I will be happy to discuss these issues with you if you need specific advice, but formal legal advice may be needed because the laws governing confidentiality are quite complex, and I am not an attorney. If you request, I will provide you with relevant portions or summaries of the state laws regarding these issues.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and agree to abide by its terms during our professional relationship.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Please, print)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Useful References**

#### Websites:

California Board of Psychology: <http://www.psychboard.ca.gov/>

Patient's Bill of Rights: <http://www.psychboard.ca.gov/billofrights.html>

Filing a Complaint: <http://www.psychboard.ca.gov/enforce/complaints.html>  
Board Of Psychology - (800) 633-2322  
1422 Howe Avenue, Suite 22, Sacramento CA 95825

#### Books:

When to Say Goodbye to Your Therapist, by Catherine Johnson, Ph.D.

The Drama of the Gifted Child, by Alice Miller

Who Moved My Cheese? by Spencer Johnson, MD

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