

PATIENT SERVICES AGREEMENT

Welcome!

Welcome to Ruah Woods Psychological Services (RWPS). RWPS is a branch of Ruah Woods Institute, a Catholic nonprofit ministry founded in 2008 that seeks to help men and women live their vocation to love, according to God's plan, as informed by Pope St. John Paul II's "Theology of the Body." RWPS aids this mission by developing and providing high quality psychological services grounded in the Catholic vision of the human person to empower people to more fully embrace and more fully live out their vocation to love. The services we provide include psychotherapy, psychological evaluation, psychoeducation (e.g., speaking and writing), and consultation/training. Although our services are available to anyone regardless of religious affiliation or belief, RWPS therapists may incorporate and will follow Catholic doctrine and moral teaching in our provision of these services.

Terminology

In this document, we use the term "patient" to refer to anyone who is receiving services from RWPS. We also use the term "therapist" to refer to an employee of RWPS who is providing professional psychological services, regardless of what services are being provided.

Therapeutic Contract and Informed Consent

When you receive services from a mental health therapist, you enter into a therapeutic contract. This document is designed to make this contract explicit and provide important information about RWPS policies and procedures. Please read it carefully and discuss any questions or concerns you have with your therapist. More detailed information regarding our privacy policies and how we handle your Protected Health Information (PHI) can be found in our **Notice of Privacy Practices**. In addition, the **Good Faith Estimate / Fees & Financial Policies** document provides details about the cost of our services and related matters. We require your consent to all three of these documents before entering into a professional relationship with you as our patient. You have the right to withhold consent from us. However, if you choose to do so, we will be unable to provide you services. In such a case, we would offer to refer you to another provider. Similarly, you have the right to revoke your consent from us in writing at any time. At that point, we will have to stop providing services to you, unless we are otherwise legally obligated to provide services. We are permitted to seek any outstanding payments for services we provided to you prior to your consent being revoked.

Confidentiality and its Limits

In general, what you discuss at RWPS and even the fact that you are our patient will remain confidential. However, there are some important limits to confidentiality. These are described in detail in our **Notice of Privacy Practices** in sections III.A-C. Please review that information carefully. The director of RWPS (Dr. Andrew Sodergren) will ensure that anyone working for RWPS (e.g., answering the phone, scheduling, accounting, etc.) will maintain your confidentiality as well. We also ask you not to disclose the identity of any other person being seen in this office. To help maintain the privacy of all of our patients, we ask that you take care of any business with our front desk before your scheduled appointment and not re-enter the waiting room afterward.

Working with a Minor

There are special considerations regarding confidentiality and access to records that pertain when we provide services to a minor. These are described in detail in our **Notice of Privacy Practices** in sections III.A and

IV. If you are a minor or are the parent / guardian of a minor whom we will be serving, please review that information carefully.

Working with Couples

There are also special considerations regarding confidentiality and access to records when we work with a couple (or other group of adults). These are described in detail in our **Notice of Privacy Practices** in sections III.A. If you are seeking our services as part of a couple (or other group of adults), please review that information carefully. In brief, in such cases we consider the relationship to be the primary patient and base our clinical decisions on what is best for the relationship. Each adult will have separate clinical files and unique credentials to access the Patient Portal. For convenience, we ask that one party be designated as responsible for billing and scheduling. Please note that we do not perform or participate in any way in custody evaluations or divorce proceedings.

Working with Identity-Related Issues

For individuals experiencing identity-related concerns, we provide open-ended, exploratory psychotherapy. In this work, the safety of the therapeutic relationship and freedom to engage in self-exploration is critical. We aim to support our patients' ability to freely explore their identity questions to reach deeper self-understanding and self-acceptance. In therapy, we intentionally use the pronouns I, You, Me, We, and Us. Other pronouns are typically not needed and are avoided in order to maintain the open-ended exploratory frame. Our official clinical records will reflect the patient's current legal name, biological sex, and corresponding pronouns. Please note that we do not conduct readiness assessments, consult, or refer for the purpose of obtaining puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones, and/or surgical interventions related to gender identity.

Online Patient Portal

RWPS uses a cloud-based, electronic practice management system hosted by TherapyAppointment.com. This system features a Patient Portal, which has several features of use to you. Through the Patient Portal you may:

- Enter or modify your contact and financial information
- Complete and sign forms
- Schedule and cancel appointments
- View financial statements
- Make payments
- Send a secure (encrypted) message to your therapist (if your therapist has enabled this feature).

We urge you to familiarize yourself with these features. The Patient Portal can most easily be accessed by going to the RWPS website (www.RWpsych.org) and clicking on the words "Patient Portal" in the upper right portion of the screen. Then click on the button with your therapist's name and log in to the Portal. If you have any trouble logging into your account (e.g., you cannot find the correct page, cannot remember your login information, etc.), please contact the RWPS front desk at 513-407-8878.

TherapyAppointment.com uses the latest in HIPAA-compliant, industry-standard security measures to keep your data secure. However, we want to caution you against using a public access computer or a nonsecure / public network to access your Patient Portal as others may be able to access your private information. Similarly, we caution you against using auto-fill for your username and password to the Patient Portal as this creates additional risks to the security of your private information. We also urge you to consider any applicable employer policies related to use of work computers for personal communication.

Appointments

- **Scheduling:** At RWPS, the first appointment (a 90-minute clinical interview) must be scheduled by calling the front desk at 513-407-8878. For subsequent appointments, we encourage you to schedule using the online calendar in the Patient Portal. You may also schedule appointments with your therapist when you are at session or with the RWPS front desk (in person or via phone). To help maintain the privacy of all of our patients, we ask that you take care of any business (e.g., scheduling) with our front desk **before** your appointments and not re-enter the waiting room afterward.
- **Time limits:** Typical appointments normally last **45-50 minutes**. This allows the therapist a short break in between sessions to complete clinical notes, attend to personal or administrative matters, prepare for the next patient, etc. We ask that you work together with us to start and end appointments on time and to make the most of the time we have together. If we are ever unable to start on time, we ask your understanding. If possible, you will receive the full time (e.g., 45-50 minutes) you had scheduled. If you are late, we may be unable to meet for the full time due to scheduling constraints. Some services may require more than 50 minutes (e.g., initial intake interviews, group therapy sessions, psychological testing). Such appointments must be scheduled by the RWPS front desk or an RWPS therapist.
- **Appointment Reminders:** To help you with keeping your appointments, our scheduling system has the ability to send appointment reminders to you via text, email, or phone call. Please talk with our front desk personnel or your therapist to express your preference for how to receive appointment reminders. These reminders are typically sent out 48-hours prior to your appointment.
- **Cancelling & No Shows:** Cancelling or missing appointments delays your progress. Please try not to miss sessions if you can possibly help it. However, we understand that scheduling conflicts commonly occur, and we encourage you to use the Patient Portal to reschedule appointments as needed or call our front desk for help. Since we have a limited number of appointment slots to offer, RWPS requires at least 24 hours advance notice of cancellations. The online scheduling program will not allow you to cancel if it is less than 24 hours until your scheduled appointment. To cancel or re-schedule an appointment within the 24-hour period, you must call the RWPS front desk. We reserve the right to charge a “Late Cancel / No Show” fee of **\$90** for appointments that are cancelled with less than 24-hours notice or if you do not arrive for an appointment. Your therapist will determine the appropriateness of charging this fee on a case-by-case basis. This fee is not reimbursable by insurance.

Fees & Financial Policies

The “**Good Faith Estimate / Fees & Financial Policies**” document provides important information about the cost of our services and our various financial policies. Please review it carefully and discuss any questions you might have with us.

Communicating with Your Therapist

The best time and place to communicate with your RWPS therapist is during your regularly scheduled appointment. However, sometimes a need may arise to get in touch between visits.

- **Phone calls:** If you need to contact us outside of session, you are welcome to call our office at 513-407-8878. The front desk can handle a wide range of issues related to scheduling, billing, and related administrative tasks. If you have a question or issue that only your therapist can address, you may ask to speak with your therapist or select his/her extension from the menu. We ask that you keep these phone calls brief. We reserve the right to charge a portion of our regular fee for phone calls that exceed 15 minutes. If we are unavailable to take your call, you are welcome to leave a voicemail. If you leave a valid phone number, we will return your call as soon as possible. If we are unable to

reach you when returning your call, we may leave a message unless you instruct us not to.

- **Patient Portal:** Another means of contacting your therapist is through the secure messaging feature in the Patient Portal (if your therapist has enabled this feature). While this electronic medium can be a helpful supplement to conversations with your therapist in session, it cannot take the place of real, face-to-face communication. Please be advised that your therapist may not be able to respond immediately. Also, be aware that these messages become a permanent part of your clinical record. Therefore, we strongly encourage you to be brief and discrete in any electronic messages you send through the Patient Portal.
- **Social media, text, email:** RWPS therapists do not communicate with patients via social media, cell phone-based text messages or messaging apps, or standard e-mail. Please do not attempt to contact us using these channels. In order to protect your confidentiality, RWPS therapists will not respond to patient attempts to communicate using these means.
- **In public:** It is possible that you and your therapist may incidentally see each other in public (e.g., at a Church event). Your therapist will respect your privacy and will not seek you out or approach you in those situations. However, if you greet us, we will greet you in turn. We encourage you to discuss with your therapist how you would like to handle these situations.

Telepsychology Sessions

We strongly value embodied presence and believe that in-person services are the gold standard for psychological care. However, if we are unable to meet in person at any point, it may be advantageous to conduct some sessions with the help of telecommunication technology (e.g., telephone, video conferencing software, etc.). If such a need arises, we will discuss this with you to discern whether telepsychology sessions are a good option for you. Before conducting any such sessions, we will also ask you to read, complete, and sign a separate consent form pertaining to services delivered via telecommunications.

Emergency Response Plan

If you experience a clinical emergency (e.g., are in danger of doing serious harm to yourself or another person, or you experience a serious decrease in functioning), you may call the office during normal business hours and ask to speak with your therapist. If this occurs outside of office hours or you are unable to reach your therapist, we ask you to do as many of the following as necessary until the danger has passed.

If I experience a clinical emergency, I will do as many of the following as necessary until the danger has passed:

- Contact family members and/or friends
- Call a 24-hour mental health hotline such as the **Upper Room Crisis Hotline (1-888-808-8724)**, National Suicide & Crisis Lifeline **988**, or an alternate one that serves my area such as: _____.
- (If unsure, ask us.)
- Call **911** and cooperate with the dispatcher.
- Go to the nearest hospital Emergency Department.

In addition, we require all patients to provide RWPS the name and phone number of one or more Emergency Contacts. These are responsible adults (e.g., parent, spouse, relative, friend, housemate, etc.) in your geographical area who could potentially intervene in the case of a clinical emergency. For minors, this will be the parent or legal guardian. In the Patient Portal, please navigate to My Profile and then scroll down to the Contacts section and click “Add Contact.” Please enter one or more Emergency Contacts into that screen. Alternatively, you can provide this information to us, and we will enter it for you.

- I will provide RWPS with the name and phone number of one or more Emergency Contacts.

- I will keep my Emergency Contact information up to date.
- I acknowledge that RWPS may contact my Emergency Contacts in case of emergency as described above.
- Lastly, if necessary and deemed appropriate to resolve the emergency, I acknowledge that RWPS may also contact law enforcement, emergency personnel, family members, and/or potential victims.

The Benefits and Risks of Therapy

There are risks as well as many benefits associated with the services we provide. We believe it is important to think about both in making an informed decision. Regarding risks, it is common for patients in psychotherapy to experience uncomfortable emotions such as sadness, guilt, anxiety, anger, or other unpleasant feelings. We may ask you to recall painful memories. While we will work with you to minimize the risk that these memories or feelings affect your functioning outside of session, we cannot guarantee that you will not at times feel temporarily worse before experiencing improvements. In addition, individuals in therapy may experience changes in their relationships. As you begin to grow, others may notice and disapprove, which could contribute to conflict. Some family members may also resent you telling the “family secrets” to a stranger. Some people mistakenly view anyone in therapy as weak or perhaps seriously disturbed or even dangerous. Finally, even with our best efforts, there is a risk that therapy may not work out well for you.

While you consider these risks, you should know that the benefits of psychotherapy have been shown by scientists in hundreds of well-designed research studies. The findings show that, in general, psychotherapy helps people. You may wonder how long it may take for you to experience the benefits of therapy. This depends on numerous factors: the nature and intensity of the difficulty, the treatment goals, how invested you are in working toward those goals, the quality of the relationship with the therapist, frequency of sessions, etc. Research shows that many people receive substantial benefit after approximately 10-15 sessions of psychotherapy while another significant portion of people need 50+ sessions.

It is important to realize that there is no magical cure for psychological problems. Many personality traits and habits take considerable time and effort to change. Some of the most fulfilling and fruitful therapy we have had the privilege to conduct has lasted a year or more. In some cases, when we are striving for deep, transformative, and lasting change, the therapy may take even longer. Not everyone needs long-term therapy, and it is not practical for everyone. It all depends on the person and the various factors mentioned above. It is vitally important for you and your therapist to discuss these issues and collaborate about what seems best in your case.

We typically begin by getting to know you and evaluating your current functioning, relationships in the past and present, and your overall personality. We may also ask you to complete some psychological testing. We will work with you to develop an understanding of your difficulties and a plan for working together that includes the goals of therapy, frequency of sessions, the focus of our work, what strategies to utilize, etc. We may recommend individual, couple, family, and/or group therapy. We may recommend further testing. We may refer you to another, better-suited mental health or medical professional for assistance. We may recommend lifestyle changes, support groups, or other resources. Whatever the case may be, we will try to work collaboratively with you as a team. Your input, engagement, and feedback are essential!

The foundation of our work involves respect for the inherent dignity of every human person and respect for personal freedom. This enables us to welcome patients of any background and develop fruitful dialogue, even in the face of differences in ethnicity, culture, religion, politics, age, sexuality, etc. To this end, we often use open-ended, exploratory approaches to help us understand and make space for our patients’ experiences. We are committed to creating the emotional safety needed for patients to explore, uncover, and share their personal material with us. This freedom to look deeply within opens the individual to deeper levels of self-understanding and self-acceptance. In addition, such exploration encourages new insight and the

development of reflective capacities.

Beyond this stance of acceptance, curiosity, and exploration, there are a variety of types of therapy we may utilize. Some types emphasize working with emotion. Others focus on working with thoughts and beliefs. Yet others focus more on concrete behaviors. Whichever route we may pursue, our basic, fundamental approach to therapy is relational. We believe that the human personality is shaped primarily in and through our relationships. Through evaluation and therapy, we often discover interpersonal patterns that underlie the troubles that bring people to therapy. We work to deeply understand, appreciate, and, if desired, transform those patterns into new, healthier ways of relating to others, to God, and to oneself.

This relational focus also entails exploring the way that the patient and therapist are relating to each other in the here-and-now. By learning to observe how this relationship is unfolding in the present, you may be empowered to learn healthier ways of being with people. In addition, problems we tend to have in other relationships sometimes crop up in relationship with the therapist as well. This is not a setback but an ideal opportunity to explore the nature of the difficulty and find ways to overcome it. For these reasons, the therapist may routinely ask about your experience relating with him/her in session and openly discuss how the relationship and the therapy are going. If a difficulty arises, it is important to discuss it and resolve it before going on to anything else. Research has shown that the most consistent predictor of whether someone will benefit from psychotherapy is the quality of the relationship with the therapist. Thus, we take great care in forming and maintaining a good working relationship with each patient, and we invite you to be open about how you feel it is going.

It is important to note that although the relationship between therapist and patient can be very intense at times and a powerful vehicle for change, it is in your best interest that your therapist remains only your therapist. The therapist cannot have any other role in your life such as a close friend, business associate, sexual or romantic partner, etc.

The experience and exploration of emotion is another important part of successful therapy. Scientific research has shown that the best outcomes are related to experiencing a level of emotional engagement in session that is neither too much nor too little. If the intensity of emotion is too much, the ability to think and verbalize can be hindered. Conversely, too little emotional engagement means that the therapy lacks vitality. We strive to facilitate therapeutic conversations in which the patient is sufficiently emotionally engaged while still able to verbalize and process the experience. Bringing together thinking and feeling in this way appears to promote integration of brain systems and ultimately, psychological health. We invite you to work with us to achieve and maintain this optimal level of emotional engagement in your sessions.

We may also recommend certain skills or exercises to practice outside of session. These can take a variety of forms from recommended reading, to written exercises, to relaxation or imagery exercises, spiritual strategies, interactive tasks involving other people, or whatever else is judged to be potentially helpful. Working diligently on these “homework” tasks can help move the therapy along more efficiently and aid your personal growth and healing.

Termination

Our hope is that the decision to stop engaging in our services will be made collaboratively between patient and therapist. However, there are some circumstances where we may choose to end our professional relationship with you. These include (but are not limited to):

- You are not benefiting from our services;
- You routinely cancel sessions or do not show up for them;
- You make threats or present safety concerns for any staff member of Ruah Woods, our families, or

- other patients;
- You violate the confidentiality of our other patients;
 - You accrue an unpaid balance and our attempts to work out a solution with you have been unsuccessful;
 - You or your therapist move away, or we do not hear from you for several months.

In situations such as these, we reserve the right to cease providing services to you and close your file. Whenever possible and appropriate, we will provide referrals to other providers to continue your care.

Questions?

If you have any questions about anything contained in this document or about RWPS services or policies, please do not hesitate to ask your therapist.