



Client Rights in Therapy

Clients in therapy have the following rights to ensure that they receive ethical, competent, and respectful care:

Right to Non-Discrimination, Dignity and Respect

Clients are entitled to fair treatment regardless of their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, religion, or other aspects of identity. Clients have the right to have their cultural values, beliefs, and personal preferences respected and incorporated into their treatment planning. Therapists are responsible for ensuring they are culturally competent to treat these clients, and if not, should refer to another provider who can serve the client or seek supervision, consultation and/or additional education to better serve them. Clients have the right to be treated with respect, dignity, and without discrimination. This includes having their boundaries respected, being listened to, and having their concerns taken seriously.

Right to Confidentiality

Clients have the right to expect that personal information shared in therapy will remain confidential, except in cases where disclosure is required by law or if there is a risk of harm. Clients should be informed about the specific limits of confidentiality (e.g., situations involving harm to self or others, child abuse, or court orders).

Right to Informed Consent

Clients have the right to be fully informed about the nature of the therapy process, including the therapist's qualifications, treatment methods, and goals of therapy. Clients should be made aware of any potential risks associated with therapy, including how confidentiality may be handled (e.g., exceptions to confidentiality in cases of danger to self or others).

Right to Informed Consent for Telehealth Services

If therapy is being provided via telehealth (e.g., video, phone), clients have the right to be informed about the technology being used, the risks involved (such as confidentiality concerns with online communication), and how the telehealth process works. Clients also have the right to choose whether they want to engage in telehealth sessions or prefer in-person therapy.

Right to Clear Communication About Fees and Costs

Clients have the right to clear information regarding the therapist's fees, billing practices, and any additional costs associated with therapy, including information about insurance and out-of-network benefits.



Right to Competent Care

Clients have the right to receive services from a therapist who is properly trained, licensed, and adheres to ethical standards. Therapists should seek supervision or consultation as needed to ensure ethical and effective treatment, especially if they are working with complex issues or populations outside their expertise.

Right to Autonomy in Decision Making

Clients have the right to set their own therapeutic goals and make decisions regarding the direction of their treatment. Therapy should be collaborative, with the therapist respecting the client's values, preferences, and wishes. Clients have the right to end therapy at any time, with or without explanation. The therapist should respect the client's decision to discontinue treatment, but may offer a discussion or provide referrals if appropriate.

Right to Participate in the Therapeutic Process

Clients have the right to actively participate in the therapy process, including discussing any concerns, preferences, or feedback about the therapy or the therapeutic relationship. While the therapist brings their expertise, clients have the right to actively participate in setting treatment goals, discussing their treatment plan, and making informed choices about the interventions used.

Right to Refuse Treatment

Clients have the right to refuse or decline specific treatments or interventions recommended by their therapist, including the right to refuse medications (if applicable) or certain therapeutic techniques, as long as doing so does not present an immediate risk to themselves or others. Clients should be informed of the possible risks and consequences of refusing treatment or making alternative treatment choices, so they can make an informed decision.

Right to Access to Medical Records

Clients have the right to request and receive a copy of their treatment records, including therapy notes, assessments, and other relevant documentation. In the U.S., this is protected under the **Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA)**, which ensures the right to access and request corrections to medical records. Records should remain confidential and should only be released with the client's written consent, unless otherwise required by law (e.g., to protect someone from harm, or in the case of a legal subpoena).

Right to Emergency Services

Clients have the right to receive emergency care if they are in a crisis situation. This includes access to emergency hotlines, psychiatric evaluations, or crisis intervention services as needed. If a client requires more intensive care (e.g., inpatient treatment), the therapist is typically required to provide appropriate referrals or assist the client in accessing those services.



Right to Protection from Harmful Practices

Clients have the right to be treated using ethical and evidence-based practices. They should not be exposed to harmful or outdated interventions. Therapists are required to be competent in the techniques and interventions they use, and clients should not be subjected to treatment that may be harmful or ineffective. Clients have the right to be free from any form of exploitation or abuse by the therapist, including financial, emotional, physical, or sexual exploitation.

Right to No Harm from Conflicts of Interest

Clients have the right to be protected from any situation where the therapist's interests conflict with the client's best interests. For example, if a therapist has a personal or financial conflict of interest that could impair their objectivity, the therapist must disclose this to the client and make arrangements to avoid harm.

Right to File a Complaint or Grievance

If a client has concerns or complaints about the therapy process, they have the right to bring them to the therapist's attention. Clients have the right to file complaints about their treatment with the therapist's licensing board or professional association (e.g., the AAMFT, ACA, NASW), or with the practice if they feel that their rights have been violated, or they have concerns about the treatment they are receiving.



Client Responsibilities

In an outpatient mental health setting, clients also have certain **responsibilities** to ensure the therapeutic process is effective, ethical, and respectful. These responsibilities support both the client's progress and the therapist's ability to provide quality care. Here are some of the key responsibilities clients have in this setting:

Active Participation in the Therapeutic Process

Clients are expected to actively participate in therapy by being honest, open, and willing to engage in the therapeutic work. This includes discussing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors that may be difficult or uncomfortable. Therapy is a collaborative process. Clients should work with the therapist to set goals, explore different approaches, and be open to feedback or new perspectives.

Commitment to Attending Sessions

Clients are responsible for attending scheduled sessions regularly and being on time. If they are unable to attend, they should notify the therapist in advance and reschedule when possible. While therapists work to accommodate clients, it is ultimately the client's responsibility to make therapy a priority and keep their appointments.

Communicating Clearly and Honestly

Clients are responsible for communicating openly about their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in therapy. This includes being honest about the progress they're making, challenges they're facing, and any concerns or discomfort with the therapy process. If something is not working for the client or if they feel uncomfortable with certain approaches or interventions, it's important for them to communicate this with the therapist so adjustments can be made.

Self-Care and Accountability

Clients are responsible for applying insights and strategies learned in therapy to their daily lives. This may involve practicing coping skills, implementing new strategies for healthier behaviors, or actively working on personal growth between sessions. While therapists offer support, clients must take responsibility for their own mental health and well-being, including seeking additional support or self-care outside of therapy when necessary (e.g., seeking medical care, joining support groups, or engaging in healthy activities).

Respecting the Limits of Therapy

Clients are responsible for recognizing that therapy is not a substitute for emergency care or medical treatment. In cases of a mental health crisis or emergency, clients should seek appropriate help (e.g., emergency services, inpatient care). Clients should understand that the therapeutic relationship is distinct from personal or social relationships. They are responsible for maintaining a respectful and professional relationship with their therapist throughout the process.



Providing Necessary Information for Effective Treatment

Clients are responsible for sharing relevant personal, medical, or psychological history with their therapist, including any changes in their mental health, physical health, or life circumstances that may affect treatment. If clients are seeing other providers or using medications that might affect their therapy (such as psychiatric medications), they should disclose this information to the therapist.

Honoring Financial and Payment Agreements

Clients are responsible for understanding and adhering to the financial policies, including fees, billing practices, and insurance-related matters. This also includes paying for services rendered or working out a payment plan, if applicable.

Adhering to Boundaries and Respecting the Therapeutic Relationship

Clients are responsible for respecting the therapist's professional boundaries, including refraining from inappropriate contact outside of scheduled sessions or attempts to engage in relationships that could compromise the therapeutic process. Clients should foster an atmosphere of mutual respect and trust, allowing both the therapist and the client to feel comfortable during sessions.

Understanding Limitations of Confidentiality

Clients are responsible for understanding that confidentiality in therapy is not absolute and is subject to certain legal and ethical exceptions (e.g., if there is risk of harm to self or others, or in cases of abuse). Clients are encouraged to ask questions if they are unclear about the therapist's confidentiality policies or the limits of confidentiality.

Conclusion

While therapists have the responsibility to provide competent, ethical, and respectful care, clients also play an active role in ensuring the success of therapy. By engaging honestly, attending sessions consistently, maintaining open communication, and taking responsibility for their treatment, clients contribute to the therapeutic process and the development of a safe, effective, and collaborative environment.