

Informed Consent Addendum – Couple and Family Counseling

Jerri Shields

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This addendum accompanies the Informed Consent for Assessment and Treatment. Please make sure you have read and signed that form before you read this consent. I take the health and happiness of couples and families very seriously. It is my desire that your relationships are safe, nurturing, and fulfilling. Unfortunately, the very relationships we often look to for support and encouragement are sources of stress and hurt. This informed consent for couples and families provides important information regarding counseling services provided by Jerri Shields. It is important that you read this document carefully and discuss any questions you might have before you sign it.

Who is the client?

In working with couples and families **the relationship** is considered the “client”. There is one file and one treatment plan. This is different from individual counseling so please consider the following ramifications.

Confidentiality

While communication and records created in the process of counseling are held in strict confidence, this is shared among all parties of the couple or family. If any one of you discusses something outside the presence of the other(s), you should expect me to encourage you to share this information with your partner or the rest of the family. I will disclose any and all information shared with me, as I deem pertinent. For example, anyone may schedule an appointment with me but I expect that individual has coordinated or will communicate the appointment time with the other(s). If someone does not show up for an appointment or leaves a scheduled appointment I will meet with the other(s) for the scheduled time. In doing so I retain the right to share any and all information discussed in a person’s absence with the person(s).

Domestic Violence

If severe domestic violence or threats of harm are disclosed to me outside the presence of another, I may not share this information with the alleged offender or there may be a delay in discussing this information. While arguments and conflict among couples and families are common place, physical assault and threats of harm are criminal matters. Disclosure of such information may require contacting law enforcement or an assessment of the safety of the persons involved. I will take necessary steps to protect the safety of each member of the relationship.

However there are several exceptions to confidentiality defined in state and federal law. Some of these include: threats to take your own life; threats to take someone else’s life; disclosure of child abuse or neglect; disclosure of abuse or neglect of a vulnerable adult; and a court subpoena.

Individual Counseling Before or After Couple or Family Counseling

I do not transition from individual counseling to couples counseling in an effort to remain unbiased, but will refer to other professionals for the couples or family counseling needed. If, in the rare circumstances I do transition from couples or family counseling to individual counseling, I will **not** transition back to couples or family counseling. Should such counseling be desirable I will provide referrals to alternative counselors. There may be times when I will see members of a family individually but this is usually for specific assessment purposes only. Remember that confidence is shared between myself and you as a couple or family – not as individuals.

Divorce or other Court Proceedings

I have never worked with custody or other court proceedings. However, there are times when divorce, custody or other court hearings occur following counseling. Because I have worked with you as a couple or family it is not my role to advocate for any one of you. Should I be required to spend additional time in preparing for, reviewing, or delivering testimony for legal or court matters there will be an hourly fee of \$150 _____ (please initial).

Benefits and Risks

Couples and families come in for counseling for many reasons. While couple and family therapy has shown to have many benefits including better relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reduction in feelings of distress there are no guarantees that your marriage or family will experience these benefits. Counseling cannot guarantee that your family will not experience increased tension, ongoing conflict, separation, or divorce. In fact, not all parties entering couple or family counseling have the preservation of the marriage or family as their goal. Some individuals approach counseling as a means of facilitating the dissolution of a marriage or family. It is my belief that each person is responsible for his or her own behavior and each marriage partner has a legal right to seek a separation or divorce if he or she so chooses. I realize that we all have individual and collective issues and have either made decisions or have been on the receiving end of decisions that can often leave us with limited options between unpleasant choices. Behavior such as abandonment and infidelity may not be able to be overcome and relationships intended to be permanent may end. Counseling is not a magical cure for all of life's hurts and injustices. While counseling *often* helps distressed couples and families, your marriage or family may not benefit from this counseling. If no substantial progress is made toward your goals you may elect to get counseling elsewhere and I will assist you in finding an alternative counselor if you so desire.

Methods for obtaining information about your records

Client records and information are in the custodial property of Jerri Shields (Choice Counseling Services, LLC). If I am unavailable for an extended period of time, a protocol has been established so that you may be able to access your records. Your records belong to you as a couple or family. In accordance with Arizona Revised Statute (A.R.S.) §12-2293, upon receipt of your written request I shall provide either of you access to or copies of your records. If I determine that you should not have access to your client records, I shall note this determination in your client record. Because these are professional records, they can be misinterpreted and/or upsetting to untrained readers. For this reason, I recommend that you initially review them in my presence.

Consent for assessment and treatment

We voluntarily grant consent for assessment and treatment under the terms described in this consent document. We acknowledge that we have read and received a copy of this informed consent agreement. We understand that this consent may be revoked at any time with either written notice or direct verbal communication with Jerri Shields.

Printed Name

Printed Name

Client's Signature Date

Client's Signature Date