

# *Welcome to the*



*Counseling with Heart -  
Producing Results that Work  
since 1982*

## ***Introduction***

We'd like to acknowledge you for taking this step to resolve your difficulties and promote your own growth. In this packet of materials, we'll be providing you with an introduction to our philosophy and to the policies and procedures by which we operate. By familiarizing yourself with these materials, we believe you will more readily accomplish your goals.

## ***Our Philosophy***

Our purpose is to empower you to resolve the issues that bring you to counseling and to help you establish or re-establish your life as a thriving process. We believe that every situation, every experience -- no matter how difficult, painful, or "stuck" it may be - holds within it the opportunity for creative growth.

One of the key ways we have found to promote growth and positive change is to practice clear communication and to keep agreements. Our purpose in having policies, procedures, and agreements is to create an environment in which growth can occur: a space characterized by safety, consistency, and support. Our intention is to assist you to realize your goals in therapy. Please review the policies and procedures below and feel free to ask your therapist if you have any questions or need clarification.

## ***Procedures***

### ***Arriving at the Center***

When you arrive at the Center for future sessions, please wait in the waiting area for your therapist. She or he will come to meet you there at the time of your appointment. If you arrive late, please proceed directly to your therapist's office by entering through the outside door marked "Restrooms and Offices." However, if your therapist's door is closed, please return to the waiting room and you will be met there as usual. Important note: Whenever you enter or leave through the door marked "Restrooms and Offices," please make sure to hold the door so it closes quietly.

After your first appointment, and once they have shown you which office you will be meeting in, some of our therapists prefer to have you come directly to their office at the time of your appointment, rather than meeting you in the waiting room. Your therapist will tell you which system she or he uses. Please note: If you go to your therapist's office and the door is closed, with an "in session" sign or blue string on the door knob, even though it is your appointment time, please return to the waiting room and your therapist will come to get you.

## ***Leaving Messages for Your Therapist***

Please use the phone list below to leave a message for your therapist or our Directors. Our phone is usually answered by a confidential voicemail system which is a 24-hour, 7 day-a-week voicemail, so you can call anytime to leave us a message.

When you reach our voicemail system, you'll first hear our general greeting message. This greeting message will list the extension number that you need to press in order to leave a message for your own therapist. You can press that extension number at any time during the main greeting message in order to be connected to your therapist's individual voice mailbox.

The following is a list of the phone number and extensions to use to reach our Berkeley therapists:

Linda Katz	510/527-2100, extension 1
Daniel Lesny	510/527-2100, extension 3
Lisa Gilberti	510/527-2100, extension 4
Jason Saffer	510/527-2100, extension 5
Keely Burke	510/527-2100, extension 8
Adriana Abril	510/527-2100, extension 16

After pressing your therapist's extension number, you can either listen to the entire message from your therapist or you can press the pound key (the # symbol on your touchtone phone) and leave your message for her or him at the sound of the tone.

## ***Emergencies***

If you call with an emergency and reach our voicemail system, please use the following procedure so that you will get a call back as soon as possible: First, leave your message for the therapist in his or her individual voice mailbox and also call 925/930-3383. Be sure to tell the operator who answers that it is an *emergency*. They will do their best to reach your therapist or will have another therapist call you as soon as possible. If your therapist is unavailable (in session, out of town, or for some other reason), another staff person from the Center will call you back. If you don't feel that you can wait for a callback from your therapist or another therapist from our Center, please call the Crisis Line at 1-800-309-2131.

## ***Policies***

### ***Confidentiality***

What goes on in your session is legally confidential. You can share whatever you'd like with whomever you'd like. We will share information about you and your therapy with others only with your written permission beforehand. There are a few exceptions to this that we'd like you to know about:

- We will share information with other staff members at our Center as needed.
- If you are a danger to yourself or to others, the legal protection of confidentiality is no longer in effect.
- If there is a reasonable suspicion of child abuse, elder abuse, or dependent adult abuse we are legally required to report this.

### ***Length of Sessions/Punctuality***

Individual and couples therapy sessions are usually fifty minutes in length. Family sessions are usually longer and group therapy sessions are from two to two-and-a-half hours in length, depending on the group. You and your therapist will determine the usual length of your session when you first begin work with us. The length of your sessions may change as your therapy needs change in the course of your work with us.

Please be prompt for your sessions. If we begin a session late due to your being late, the session will end on time. If we begin a session late due to our running late, we'll extend the session without extra cost so you'll have the full time available. On occasion, we will extend the usual time of a session if it is inadvisable to cut off the therapy work at the scheduled end of session. In such cases, you will be charged for the additional time. Whenever possible, we will alert you to the need to extend a session beforehand.

### ***Attaining Your Goals/Attending Your Sessions***

The usual format is to participate in weekly sessions. Attaining your goals in therapy depends upon your regular, weekly attendance. Relieving the pain and resolving the issues that brought you to therapy, as well as unlearning old patterns, and establishing new, more effective ones, all require consistent, regular participation in your therapy, with the minimum of disruption or absence. The regular, weekly *continuity* of your therapy is essential for the success of your therapy.

## ***Cancellations and Other Schedule Changes***

We require *more than 24 hours advance notice* if you need to cancel or change your scheduled session. Please note that if you cancel or change your scheduled session with less than 24 hours notice, you will be financially responsible for that session. (Example: if your session is on Tuesday at 10am, you'll need to cancel your session *before* 10am the Monday before, in order to not be charged for that session).

In cases of severe emergency, this 24-hour notification policy may be waived. Severe emergencies include instances of sudden hospitalization for you or a family member, sudden death in the family, being stuck on a closed bridge, in a closed tunnel, or on a closed freeway, or natural disaster. Examples of situations that we do not consider severe emergencies include: illness, other traffic problems, work-related commitments, childcare problems, forgotten appointments, or other comparable situations. Any exceptions to the above guidelines would need to be authorized by the Center's Directors.

If you need to make changes in already scheduled future session times or handle other scheduling issues, please bring this up at the beginning of the session rather than at the end of the session, again, so that "business issues" don't intrude on the therapy work you've done that day. We have found that it is more supportive and more nurturing to clients to get business matters out of the way at the beginning of sessions.

## ***Vacations and Other Trips***

Please give us at least 2 weeks or more notice if you know you'll be gone for vacation or for business-related trips. Our therapists will do their best to give you a minimum of one month's notice when they will be gone due to vacation or other pre-planned reasons.

## ***Establishing Your Fee***

Your fee is set prior to your first appointment. Factors that determine your fee are: which form of therapy you are contracting for (individual, couple, family, or group therapy); which of our therapists you are seeing; and the length of your session.

Periodically, over the years, the Center has initiated small fee increases. We always provide advance notice for any increase that will change your fee.

As a nonprofit counseling center that serves the community without the support of grants, we rely on the integrity of our clients when we set fees over the phone. Unlike other counseling centers that ask for your financial statements and use formulas to calculate your fee, we simply ask you to tell us if you can handle our regular fees. If you cannot, we ask what you can handle on a weekly basis, without it being a *financial hardship* for you. We do our best to accommodate this.

What we mean by *financial hardship* is a fee that would affect your ability to pay for your food, housing, or other basic necessities. Because therapy is an additional expense, we recognize, and even anticipate, that it may impact your entertainment, travel, or other desirable, but non-essential, expenses. We want to support you in maintaining a balanced lifestyle, while also asking you to pay as full a fee as you can. Therefore, part of the agreement of having a sliding-scale fee at our Center is our good faith understanding that if and when your income increases or your financial situation improves due to any reason, or you recognize that you originally set too low a fee with us on the phone, you will let your therapist know, so that your fee can be adjusted. By the same token, your therapist may discuss your fee with you if he or she feels it necessary.

Therapy is an investment in *yourself* and your long term well-being and happiness. Therefore, if you have been given a special accommodation in fee and find at any point that you are actually able to pay a higher fee, we appreciate your letting your therapist know this. We always appreciate when clients being seen for sliding-scale fees voluntarily offer to increase the fee they pay to their therapist. This helps us, as a nonprofit counseling center, to continue to offer our services to the community-at-large, including those who truly need very low-fee services.

We are also open to your requesting a reduction in your fee, should you ever need, because of some change in your financial situation. We ask that you bring this to your therapist's attention at the beginning of a session and as soon as possible. Together, you can determine the course of action that will be of most service to you.

### ***Payment of Fees***

Please pay for your session by check (made out to "Center for Creative Growth" or "CCG"), by cash, or by credit or debit card, if you prefer. The fee that is set in your phone intake session prior to your first appointment is our "discount" rate and is based on your paying for your sessions with either cash or check. Session fees paid by credit or debit card are not eligible for our "discount rate" and therefore cost \$5 more per session than our "discount rate." In order to maximize the amount of time you and your therapist will have together each week to focus on therapy issues, and to prevent business matters from intruding on the work you have done in that day's session, we request that you make payment directly to your therapist, at the beginning of your session. You might find it helpful to prepare your check prior to the session. Please know that if your check does not clear the bank, the Center will assess a \$15.00 bounced check charge.

In addition, there is a fee charged for any forms, letters, or reports that your therapist fills out or writes for you at your request. The fee is based on a pro-rated fee of \$80 per hour. You will be charged only for the amount of time that your therapist spends working on the document.

### ***Phone Consultation***

Other than for brief phone contact, our therapists charge for time spent consulting with you on the phone. Please note that you will be charged for phone sessions at the same rate as your office sessions, on a proportionate basis based on the amount of time spent on the phone with you.

### ***Insurance Reimbursement***

Although you are responsible for the fee for the therapy services you receive at our Center, your health insurance policy may reimburse you for all or part of your therapy fees. Please check your written policy or call your insurance company to see if mental health, psychological, or outpatient counseling services are covered. Your policy may require you to obtain a "physician's referral." If that's the case, you'll need to contact a medical doctor and ask her/him to refer you to us for counseling. Ask your doctor to write this up on a prescription slip which you'll then give to us.

Sometimes, a policy may specify that only licensed psychiatrists or psychologists are covered. Please note that if your policy covers some therapy services, insurance companies are required to reimburse for all licensed psychotherapy services offered in California, including those offered at our Center. (The only exception to this law is the "self-insured" company. Even then, appeals can be made and are often won.) Our Berkeley-office therapists are California licensed Marriage, Family & Child Counselors and supervised trainees and interns. Ask your therapist for assistance if you run into difficulties obtaining reimbursement from your insurance company.

It is our policy that you pay for the full cost of service and have your insurance company reimburse you directly. Your therapist will give you billing statements to submit to your insurance company.

Please note: We are required to note on insurance bills if sessions were missed or cancelled late. In such cases, your insurance company may or may not reimburse you for that session.

### ***Terminating Therapy***

Therapy is usually terminated when a client feels they have accomplished the goals that brought them to therapy. Sometimes a client ends one form of therapy to begin another. For example, clients may end individual therapy, with the support of their therapist, in order to practice and expand their newly gained skills in a group therapy setting. Ending therapy is usually done over a period of time (at least four sessions) and in consultation with your therapist; however, you have the right to stop your therapy work with us at any time.

There are certain situations in which your therapist may be the one to choose to end the therapy work. The following are the types of situations in which this might occur:

- a) If your therapist determines that in her/his opinion the therapy work is not benefiting you.
- b) If your therapist assesses that your issues are beyond her/his level of competence, the ethical standards of the Marriage and Family Therapist's code requires that your therapist refer you to someone more skilled in the area of your needs. In addition, our therapists are required to work only within the scope of their license.
- c) If you become financially unable to pay for your sessions, your therapist may need to end their therapy work with you. Allowing a debt to build is often harmful to the therapeutic relationship. Should you encounter financial difficulties during the course of your therapy work, please discuss the situation with your therapist as soon as possible. We do our best, within healthy limits, to support people in times of temporary financial difficulty.
- d) If your therapist feels that you are not keeping the agreements established in your therapy contract (for example, coming to sessions sober; obtaining a psychiatric consultation if requested; attending 12-step meetings as agreed to), your therapist may consider it advisable to end your therapy work.

A therapist initiates either termination of a client's therapy work or a referral to another therapist only in the best interests of the client. Our ethical standards prohibit us from continuing to work with a client whom we feel we are not serving or are not qualified to serve.

We want each person who comes to our Center to be served in the best possible way -- even if it means, after assessing the needs of the client, referring that client elsewhere.

### ***E-Mail Notification of Upcoming Events***

If you have provided us with your e-mail address, we occasionally send out notices and announcements about upcoming one-day workshops, therapy group openings, and similar events sponsored by our Center. We do not provide your e-mail address to anyone else or to any other organization. If you would prefer that we not send you these occasional e-mail announcements, please let your therapist know.

### ***Special Request***

**FRAGRANCE-FREE NEEDS:** Because many people in today's world are allergic to fragrances, we are asking everyone's assistance in making our Center a scent-free and safe environment. We ask that you do not wear perfume, colognes, body oils, or scented

aftershave lotions on the day that you come to the Center. If you wear these products, the fragrance affects the waiting room, bathrooms, and hallways of the Center. Because even trace scents create pain for people with this condition, we ask that you refrain from wearing fragrances at all on the day you come to CCG. We deeply appreciate your support in this matter and apologize for any inconvenience or disruption this may cause you.

### ***Privacy Practices of the Center for Creative Growth***

Federal law that went into effect on April 14, 2003 requires us to prepare and distribute our Notice of Privacy Practices. Please see our Notices of Privacy Practices on our display rack in the waiting room, which incorporates language and policies now required by Federal law and regulation. Our Notice of Privacy Practices provides information about how we may use and disclose your protected health information. We encourage you to read it in full. Our Notice of Privacy Practices is subject to change. If we change our notice, you may obtain a copy of the revised notice from us by contacting us at 510/517-2100. If you have any questions about our Notice of Privacy Practices, please contact us at: Center for Creative Growth, 1221 Marin Avenue, Berkeley, CA 94706, 510/527-2100.

### ***Conclusion***

Please feel free to ask your therapist any questions you may have about our Center's policies and procedures. We trust that your experience of our Center will be growthful, productive, and healing. We welcome you to the beginning of your journey with us.