

**JUDITH WESTON-THOMPSON, MFT, CEIP-MH**

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist

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CA License #MFC23268

Phone; 415-457-3800

## **Policies & General Information Agreement**

*This form provides you, the client, with information that is additional to that detailed in the [Notice of Privacy Practices](#) and it is subject to HIPAA preemptive analysis.*

**CONFIDENTIALITY:** All information disclosed within sessions and the written records pertaining to those sessions *are confidential* and may not be revealed to anyone without your written permission except where disclosure is required by law.

**WHEN DISCLOSURE IS REQUIRED OR MAY BE REQUIRED BY LAW:** Some of the circumstances where disclosure is required or may be required by law are: where there is a reasonable suspicion of child, dependent, or elder abuse or neglect; where a client presents a danger to self, to others, to property, or is gravely disabled; or when a client's family members communicate to Judy Weston-Thompson that the client presents a danger to others. Disclosure may also be required pursuant to a legal proceeding by or against you. If you place your mental status at issue in litigation initiated by you, the defendant may have the right to obtain the psychotherapy records and/or testimony by Judy Weston-Thompson. In couple and family therapy, or when different family members are seen individually, even over a period of time, confidentiality and privilege do not apply between the couple or among family members, unless otherwise agreed upon. Judy Weston-Thompson will use her clinical judgment when revealing such information. Judy Weston-Thompson will not release records to any outside party unless she is authorized to do so by all adult parties who were part of the family therapy, couple therapy or other treatment that involved more than one adult client.

**EMERGENCY:** If there is an emergency during therapy, or in the future after termination, where Judy Weston-Thompson becomes concerned about your personal safety, the possibility of you injuring someone else, or about you receiving proper psychiatric care, she will do whatever she can within the limits of the law, to prevent you from injuring yourself or others and to ensure that you receive the proper medical care. For this purpose, she may also contact the person whose name you have provided on the biographical sheet.

**HEALTH INSURANCE & CONFIDENTIALITY OF RECORDS:** Disclosure of confidential information may be required by your health insurance carrier or HMO/PPO/MCO/EAP in order to process the claims. If you so instruct Judy Weston-Thompson

only the minimum necessary information will be communicated to the carrier. Judy Weston-Thompson has no control over, or knowledge of, what insurance companies do with the information she submits or who has access to this information. You must be aware that submitting a mental health invoice for reimbursement carries a certain amount of risk to confidentiality, privacy or to future capacity to obtain health or life insurance or even a job. The risk stems from the fact that mental health information is likely to be entered into big insurance companies' computers and is likely to be reported to the National Medical Data Bank. Accessibility to companies' computers or to the National Medical Data Bank database is always in question as computers are inherently vulnerable to hacking and unauthorized access. Medical data has also been reported to have been legally accessed by law enforcement and other agencies, which also puts you in a *vulnerable* position.

**LITIGATION LIMITATION:** Due to the nature of the therapeutic process and the fact that it often involves making a full disclosure with regard to many matters which may be of a confidential nature, it is agreed that, should there be legal proceedings (such as, but not limited to divorce and custody disputes, injuries, lawsuits, etc.), neither you nor your attorney(s), nor anyone else acting on your behalf will call on Judy Weston-Thompson to testify in court or at any other proceeding, nor will a disclosure of the psychotherapy records be requested unless otherwise agreed upon.

**CONSULTATION:** Judy Weston-Thompson consults regularly with other professionals regarding her clients; however, each client's identity remains completely anonymous and confidentiality is fully maintained.

**EMAILS, CELL PHONES, COMPUTERS, AND FAXES:** It is very important to be aware that computers and email communication can be relatively easily accessed by unauthorized people and hence can compromise the privacy and confidentiality of such communication. Faxes can easily be sent erroneously to the wrong address. Emails, in particular, are vulnerable to unauthorized access due to the fact that Internet servers have unlimited and direct access to all emails that go through them. It is important that you be aware that emails, faxes, and important texts are part of the medical records. Additionally, Judy Weston-Thompson's emails are not encrypted. Judy Weston-Thompson's computers are equipped with a firewall, a virus protection, and a password and she also backs up all confidential information from her computers on a regular basis. Please notify Judy Weston-Thompson if you decide to avoid or limit in any way the use of any or all communication devices, such as email, cell phone, or faxes. If you communicate confidential or private information via email, Judy Weston-Thompson will assume that you have made an informed decision, will view it as your agreement to take the risk that such communication may be intercepted, and will honor your desire to communicate on such matters via email. Please do not use email or faxes for emergencies.

**RECORDS AND YOUR RIGHT TO REVIEW THEM:** Both the law and the standards of Judy Weston-Thompson's profession require that she keep treatment records for at least 10 years. Unless otherwise agreed to be necessary, Judy Weston-Thompson retains clinical records only as long as is mandated by California law. If you have concerns regarding the treatment records, please discuss them with Judy Weston-Thompson. As a client, you have the right to

review or receive a summary of your records at any time, except in limited legal or emergency circumstances or when Judy Weston-Thompson assesses that releasing such information might be harmful in any way. In such a case, Judy Weston-Thompson will provide the records to an appropriate and legitimate mental health professional of your choice. Considering all of the above exclusions, if it is still appropriate, and upon your request, Judy Weston-Thompson will release information to any agency/person you specify unless Judy Weston-Thompson assesses that releasing such information might be harmful in any way. When more than one client is involved in treatment, such as in cases of couple and family therapy, Judy Weston-Thompson will release records only with signed authorizations from all the adults (or all those who legally can authorize such a release) involved in the treatment.

**TELEPHONE & EMERGENCY PROCEDURES:** If you need to contact Judy Weston-Thompson between sessions, please leave a message on the voice mail (415) 457-3800 and your call will be returned as soon as possible. Judy Weston-Thompson checks messages a few times during the daytime only, unless she is out of town. If an emergency situation arises, indicate it clearly in your message then call Emergency Services; 911. Please do not use email for emergencies.

**PAYMENTS & INSURANCE REIMBURSEMENT:** Clients are expected to pay the standard fee of \$140.00 per 50 minute session at the end of each session or at the end of the month unless other arrangements have been made. Telephone conversations, site visits, writing and reading of reports, consultation with other professionals, release of information, reading records, longer sessions, travel time, etc. will be charged at the same rate, unless indicated and agreed upon otherwise. Please notify Judy Weston-Thompson if any problems arise during the course of therapy regarding your ability to make timely payments. Clients who carry insurance should remember that professional services are rendered and charged to the clients and not to the insurance companies. Unless agreed upon differently, Judy Weston-Thompson will provide you with a copy of your receipt on a monthly basis, which you can then submit to your insurance company for reimbursement, if you so choose. As was indicated in the section, *Health Insurance & Confidentiality of Records*, you must be aware that submitting a mental health invoice for reimbursement carries a certain amount of risk. Not all issues/conditions/problems, which are dealt with in psychotherapy, are reimbursed by insurance companies. It is your responsibility to verify the specifics of your coverage. If your account is overdue (unpaid) and there is no written agreement on a payment plan, Judy Weston-Thompson can use legal or other means (courts, collection agencies, etc.) to obtain payment.

**MEDIATION & ARBITRATION:** All disputes arising out of, or in relation to, this agreement to provide psychotherapy services shall first be referred to mediation, before, and as a pre-condition of, the initiation of arbitration. The mediator shall be a neutral third party chosen by agreement of Judy Weston-Thompson and the client(s). The cost of such mediation, if any, shall be split equally, unless otherwise agreed upon. In the event that mediation is unsuccessful, any unresolved controversy related to this agreement should be submitted to and settled by binding arbitration in Marin County, California, in accordance with the rules of the American Arbitration Association which are in effect at the time the demand for arbitration is filed. Notwithstanding the foregoing, in the event that your account is overdue (unpaid) and there is no agreement on a payment plan, Judy Weston-Thompson can use legal means (court, collection agency, etc.) to

obtain payment. The prevailing party in arbitration or collection proceedings shall be entitled to recover a reasonable sum as and for attorney's fees. In the case of arbitration, the arbitrator will determine that sum.

**THE PROCESS OF THERAPY/EVALUATION AND SCOPE OF PRACTICE:**

Participation in therapy can result in a number of benefits to you, including improving interpersonal relationships and resolution of the specific concerns that led you to seek therapy. Working toward these benefits, however, requires effort on your part. Psychotherapy requires your very active involvement, honesty, and openness in order to change your thoughts, feelings, and/or behavior. Judy Weston-Thompson will ask for your feedback and views on your therapy, its progress, and other aspects of the therapy and will expect you to respond openly and honestly. Sometimes more than one approach can be helpful in dealing with a certain situation. During evaluation or therapy, remembering or talking about unpleasant events, feelings, or thoughts can result in you experiencing considerable discomfort or strong feelings of anger, sadness, worry, fear, etc., or experiencing anxiety, depression, insomnia, etc. Judy Weston-Thompson may challenge some of your assumptions or perceptions or propose different ways of looking at, thinking about, or handling situations, which can cause you to feel very upset, angry, depressed, challenged, or disappointed. Attempting to resolve issues that brought you to therapy in the first place, such as personal or interpersonal relationships, may result in changes that were not originally intended. Psychotherapy may result in decisions about changing behaviors, employment, substance use, schooling, housing, or relationships. Sometimes a decision that is positive for one family member is viewed quite negatively by another family member. Change will sometimes be easy and swift, but more often it will be slow and even frustrating. There is no guarantee that psychotherapy will yield positive or intended results. During the course of therapy, Judy Weston-Thompson is likely to draw on various psychological approaches according, in part, to the problem that is being treated and his/her assessment of what will best benefit you. These approaches include, but are not limited to, behavioral, cognitive-behavioral, cognitive, psychodynamic, existential, system/family, developmental (adult, child, family), humanistic or psycho-educational. Judy Weston-Thompson **provides neither custody evaluation recommendation nor medication or prescription recommendation nor legal advice, as these activities do not fall within his/her scope of practice.**

**TREATMENT PLANS:** Within a reasonable period of time after the initiation of treatment, Judy Weston-Thompson will discuss with you her working understanding of the problem, treatment plan, therapeutic objectives, and his/her view of the possible outcomes of treatment. If you have any unanswered questions about any of the procedures used in the course of your therapy, their possible risks, Judy Weston-Thompson's expertise in employing them, or about the treatment plan, please ask and you will be answered fully. You also have the right to ask about other treatments for your condition and their risks and benefits.

**TERMINATION:** As set forth above, after the first couple of meetings, Judy Weston-Thompson will assess if she can be of benefit to you. Judy Weston-Thompson does not accept clients who, in her opinion, s/he cannot help. In such a case, she will give you a number of referrals whom you can contact. If at any point during psychotherapy, Judy Weston-Thompson assesses that she is not effective in helping you reach the therapeutic goals or that you are non-compliant, she is obligated to discuss it with you and, if appropriate, to terminate treatment. In such a case, she would give you a number of referrals that may be of help to you. If you request

it and authorize it in writing, Ms. Weston-Thompson will talk to the psychotherapist of your choice in order to help with the transition. If, at any time, you want another professional's opinion or wish to consult with another therapist, Ms. Weston-Thompson will assist you with referrals, and, if she has your written consent, she will provide her or him with the essential information needed. You have the right to terminate therapy at any time. If you choose to do so, and if appropriate, Ms. Weston-Thompson will offer to provide you with names of other qualified professionals.

**DUAL RELATIONSHIPS:** Despite a popular perception, not all dual or multiple relationships are unethical or avoidable. Therapy never involves sexual or any other dual relationship that impairs Ms. Weston-Thompson's objectivity, clinical judgment or can be exploitative in nature. Ms. Weston-Thompson will assess carefully before entering into non-sexual and non-exploitative dual relationships with clients. It is important to realize that in some communities, particularly small towns, military bases, university campus, etc., multiple relationships are either unavoidable or expected. Ms. Weston-Thompson will never acknowledge working with anyone without his/her written permission. Many clients have chosen Ms. Weston-Thompson as their therapist because they knew her before they entered therapy with her, and/or are personally aware of his/her professional work and achievements. Nevertheless, Ms. Weston-Thompson will discuss with you the often-existing complexities, potential benefits and difficulties that may be involved in dual or multiple relationships. Dual or multiple relationships can enhance trust and therapeutic effectiveness but can also detract from it and often it is impossible to know which ahead of time. It is your responsibility to advise Ms. Weston-Thompson if the dual or multiple relationship becomes uncomfortable for you in any way. Ms. Weston-Thompson will always listen carefully and respond to your feedback and will discontinue the dual relationship if she finds it interfering with the effectiveness of the therapy or your welfare and, of course, you can do the same at any time.

**SOCIAL NETWORKING AND INTERNET SEARCHES:** At times, I may conduct a web search on my clients before the beginning of therapy or during therapy. If you have concerns or questions regarding this practice, please discuss them with me. I do not accept friend requests from current or former clients on social networking sites, such as Facebook. I believe that adding clients as friends on these sites and/or communicating via such sites is likely to compromise their privacy and confidentiality. For this same reason, I request that clients not communicate with me via any interactive or social networking web sites.

**CANCELLATION:** Since the scheduling of an appointment involves the reservation of time specifically for you, a minimum of 48 hours (2 days) notice is required for re-scheduling or canceling an appointment. Unless we reach a different agreement, the full fee will be charged for sessions missed without such notification. Most insurance companies do not reimburse for missed sessions.

Please sign the last page that you read & understand the above then keep them for your records, thank you.

I have read the above Office Policies and General Information, Agreement for Psychotherapy Services or Informed Consent for Psychotherapy carefully (a total of 6 pages); I understand them and agree to comply with them:

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**CLIENT(s) NAME**    **please print**

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**CLIENT, PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE**

**DATE**

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**ADDITIONAL CLIENT, PARENT/GUARDIAN SIGNATURE**

**DATE**