



Dr. Roger Saint-Laurent

*Clinical Psychologist*

[www.dr saintlaurent.com](http://www.dr saintlaurent.com)

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**PSYCHOTHERAPIST-PATIENT SERVICES AGREEMENT  
[NEW YORK]**

Welcome to my practice. This document (the Agreement) contains important information about my professional services and business policies. It also contains summary information about the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), a federal law that provides privacy protections and patient rights with regard to the use and disclosure of your Protected Health Information (PHI) used for the purpose of treatment, payment, and health care operations. HIPAA requires that I provide you with a Notice of Privacy Practices (the Notice) for use and disclosure of PHI for treatment, payment, and health care operations. The Notice, which is attached to this Agreement, explains HIPAA and its application to your personal health information in greater detail. The law requires that I obtain your signature acknowledging that I have provided you with this information at the end of this session. Although these documents are long and sometimes complex, it is very important that you read them carefully before our next session. We can discuss any questions you have about the procedures at that time. When you sign this document, it will also represent an agreement between us. You may revoke this Agreement in writing at any time. That revocation will be binding on me unless I have taken action in reliance on it; if there are obligations imposed on me by your health insurer in order to process or substantiate claims made under your policy; or if you have not satisfied any financial obligations you have incurred.

**PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES**

Psychotherapy is not easily described in general statements. It varies depending on the personalities of the psychologist and patient, and the particular problems you are experiencing. There are many different methods I may use to deal with the problems that you hope to address. Psychotherapy is not like a medical doctor visit. Instead, it calls for a very active effort on your part. In order for therapy to be most successful, you will have to work on things that come up both during our sessions and at home.

One general goal of psychotherapy that applies to most people seeking it is to develop or recover the natural capacity all human beings have to manage effectively the unavoidable ups and downs of life and relationships. What that will mean for you in particular is something we will want to talk about. Our work together is likely to include a variety of psychotherapeutic approaches, including but not limited to open-ended discussion, structured exploration of particular beliefs and life events, guided imagery, and a focus on your somatic experience, meaning the feelings and sensations you have in your physical body. Each psychotherapy is different; we will develop, together, the approach that is best suited to your needs.

Psychotherapy can have benefits and risks. Since therapy often involves exploring unpleasant aspects of your life, you may experience uncomfortable feelings like sadness, guilt, anger, frustration, loneliness, and helplessness. The course of therapy may require that you deal with painful experiences, unpleasant memories, or difficult thoughts in order to reach your goals. You may need to make adjustments in your life in order to find time for relaxation, reflection, and decision-making. Therapy often leads to better

relationships, solutions to specific problems, and significant reductions in feelings of distress. But there are no guarantees of what you will experience.

Our first few sessions will involve an evaluation of your needs. I will then be able to offer you some first impressions of what our work will include, if you decide to continue with therapy. You should evaluate this information along with your own opinions of whether you feel comfortable working with me.

Therapy involves a large commitment of time, money, and energy, so you should be very careful about the therapist you select. If you have questions about how I work, we should discuss them whenever they arise. If your doubts persist, I will be happy to help you set up a meeting with another mental health professional for a second opinion. If at any time we decide that medication is appropriate, I will refer you to a specialist in psychopharmacology.

## **MEETINGS**

I normally conduct an evaluation that will last from 1 to 3 sessions. During this time, we can both decide if I am the best person to provide the services you need in order to meet your treatment goals. If psychotherapy is begun, I will usually schedule one 45-minute session per week at a time we agree on, although sometimes we may decide to schedule longer or more frequent sessions. **Once an appointment is scheduled, you will be expected to pay for it unless you provide 48 hours advance notice of cancellation. It is important to note that insurance companies do not provide reimbursement for canceled sessions.** If you advise me in advance that you are unable to keep the appointment, but with less than 48 hours notice, I will try to find another time during the week to reschedule the appointment, schedules permitting. If we are unable to meet, you will be responsible to defray the cost for the missed session.

## **PROFESSIONAL FEES**

You are expected to pay my standard fee per 45-minute clinical hour or per 90-minute group psychotherapy session. If you need to cancel or reschedule an individual appointment, you must do at least 48 hours prior to your scheduled appointment, if you do not want to be responsible for the fee. You need to know that insurance companies cannot be billed for missed sessions or for late cancellations. As per my cancellation policy, less than 48 hours' notice is considered a late cancellation. If you are a member of a psychotherapy group in my practice, you will be charged for each scheduled group session even if you are unable to attend; you are in effect "buying the seat," which cannot be filled by anyone else as long as you remain a group member. In circumstances of unusual financial hardship, I may be able to arrange a fee adjustment or payment installment plan.

In addition to weekly appointments, I charge my standard fee for other professional services you may need, though I will break down the hourly cost if I work for periods of less than one hour. Other services include report writing, telephone conversations lasting longer than ten minutes, consulting with other professionals with your permission, preparation of records or treatment summaries, and the time spent performing any other service you may request of me. If you become involved in legal proceedings that require my participation, you will be expected to pay for all of my professional time, including

preparation and transportation costs, even if I am called to testify by another party. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement and the impact it may have on other appointments, I charge the equivalent of three times my standard hourly fee for time spent in preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding.

### **CONTACTING ME**

Due to my work schedule, I am often not immediately available by telephone. I am usually in my Westchester office on Wednesdays and my New York City office on Mondays, Tuesdays and Thursdays, days and evenings, but I usually will not answer the phone when I am with a patient. When I am unavailable, my telephone is answered by an answering machine that I monitor frequently. I will make every effort to return your call on the same day you make it, with the exception of weekends and holidays. If you are difficult to reach, please inform me of some times when you will be available. If you are unable to reach me and feel that you can't wait for me to return your call, contact your family physician or the nearest emergency room and ask for the psychologist or psychiatrist on call. If I will be unavailable for an extended time, I will provide you with the name of a colleague to contact, if necessary.

### **LIMITS ON CONFIDENTIALITY**

The law protects the privacy of all communications between a patient and a psychologist. In most situations, I can only release information about your treatment to others if you sign a written Authorization Form that meets certain legal requirements imposed by HIPAA. There are other situations that require only that you provide written, advance consent. Your signature on this Agreement provides consent for those activities, as follows:

- I may occasionally find it helpful to consult other health and mental health professionals about a case. During a consultation, I make every effort to avoid revealing the identity of my patient. The other professionals are also legally bound to keep the information confidential. If you don't object, I will not tell you about these consultations unless I feel that it is important to our work together
- Disclosures required by health insurers or to collect overdue fees are discussed elsewhere in this Agreement.
- If a patient threatens to harm himself/herself, I may be obligated to seek hospitalization for him/her, or to contact family members or others who can help provide protection.

There are some situations where I am permitted or required to disclose information without either your consent or Authorization:

- If you are involved in a court proceeding and a request is made for information concerning the professional services that I provided you, such information is protected by the psychologist-patient privilege law. I cannot provide any information without your written authorization, or a

court order. If you are involved in or contemplating litigation, you should consult with your attorney to determine whether a court would be likely to order me to disclose information.

- If a government agency is requesting the information for health oversight activities, I may be required to provide it for them.
- If a patient files a complaint or lawsuit against me, I may disclose relevant information regarding that patient in order to defend myself.
- If I am providing treatment for conditions directly related to worker's compensation claim, I may have to submit such records, upon appropriate request, to Chairman of the Worker's Compensation Board on such forms and at such times as the chairman may require.

There are some situations in which I am legally obligated to take actions which I believe are necessary to attempt to protect others from harm and I may have to reveal some information about a patient's treatment. These situations are unusual in my practice.

- § If I receive information in my professional capacity from a child or the parents or guardian or other custodian of a child that gives me reasonable cause to suspect that a child is an abused or neglected child, the law requires that I report to the appropriate governmental agency, usually the statewide central register of child abuse and maltreatment, or the local child protective services office. Once such a report is filed, I may be required to provide additional information.
- § If a patient communicates an immediate threat of serious physical harm to an identifiable victim, I may be required to take protective actions. These actions may include notifying the potential victim, contacting the police, or seeking hospitalization for the patient.

If such a situation arises, I will make every effort to fully discuss it with you before taking any action and I will limit my disclosure to what is necessary.

While this written summary of exceptions to confidentiality should prove helpful in informing you about potential problems, it is important that we discuss any questions or concerns that you may have now or in the future. The laws governing confidentiality can be quite complex, and I am not an attorney. In situations where specific advice is required, formal legal advice may be needed.

## **PROFESSIONAL RECORDS**

The laws and standards of my profession require that I keep Protected Health Information about you in your Clinical Record. Except in unusual circumstances that involve danger to yourself and/or others or where information has been supplied to me confidentially by others, you may examine and/or receive a copy of your Clinical Record, if you request it in writing. 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, or have them forwarded to another mental health professional so you can discuss the contents. In most circumstances, I am allowed to charge a copying fee of 75 cents per page (and for certain other expenses). If I refuse your request for access to your records, you have a right to of review, which I will discuss with you upon request.

## **PATIENT RIGHTS**

HIPAA provides you with several new or expanded rights with regard to your Clinical Records and disclosures of protected health information. These rights include requesting that I amend your record; requesting restrictions on what information from your Clinical Records is disclosed to others; requesting an accounting of most disclosures of protected health information that you have neither consented to nor authorized; determining the location to which protected information disclosures are sent; having any complaints you make about my policies and procedures recorded in your records; and the right to a paper copy of this Agreement, the attached Notice form, and my privacy policies and procedures. I am happy to discuss any of these rights with you.

### **MINORS & PARENTS**

My particular practice focuses on adults and young adults. However, you may find it useful to have the following information concerning psychotherapy with children. New York law gives children of any age the right to independently consent to and receive mental health treatment without parental consent if they request it and I determine that such services are necessary and requiring parental consent would have a detrimental effect on the course of the child's treatment. In that situation, information about that treatment cannot be disclosed to anyone without the child's agreement. Even where parental consent is given, children over age 12 have the right to control access to their treatment records. While privacy in psychotherapy is very important, particularly with teenagers, parental involvement is also essential to successful treatment, particularly with younger children. Therefore, it is my policy in those cases in which I am working with children not to provide treatment to a child under age 12 unless he/she agrees that I can share whatever information I consider necessary with his/her parents. For children age 12 and over, I request an agreement between my patient and his/her parents allowing me to share general information about the progress of the child's treatment and his/her attendance at scheduled sessions. I will also provide parents with a summary of their child's treatment when it is complete. Any other communication will require the child's Authorization, unless I feel that the child is in danger or is a danger to someone else, in which case, I will notify the parents of my concern. Before giving parents any information, I will discuss the matter with the child, if possible, and do my best to handle any objections he/she may have.

### **BILLING AND PAYMENTS**

You will be expected to pay for each session at the time it is held, unless we agree otherwise or unless you have insurance coverage that requires another arrangement to which I have agreed. Payment schedules for other professional services will be agreed to when they are requested.

If your account has not been paid for more than 60 days and arrangements for payment have not been agreed upon, I have the option of using legal means to secure the payment. This may involve hiring a collection agency or going through small claims court which will require me to disclose otherwise confidential information. In most collection situations, the only information I release regarding a patient's treatment is his/her name, the nature of services provided, and the amount due. If such legal action is necessary, its costs will be included in the claim.

### **INSURANCE REIMBURSEMENT**

In order for us to set realistic treatment goals and priorities, it is important to evaluate what resources you have available to pay for your treatment. If you have a health insurance policy, it may provide some coverage for mental health treatment. I will fill out forms and provide you with whatever assistance I can in helping you receive the benefits to which you are entitled; however, you (not your insurance company) are responsible for full payment of my fees. It is very important that you find out exactly what mental health services your insurance policy covers.

You should carefully read the section in your insurance coverage booklet that describes mental health services. If you have questions about the coverage, call your plan administrator. Of course, I will provide you with whatever information I can based on my experience and will be happy to help you in understanding the information you receive from your insurance company. If it is necessary to clear confusion, I will be willing to call the company on your behalf.

Due to the rising costs of health care, insurance benefits have increasingly become more complex. It is sometimes difficult to determine exactly how much mental health coverage is available. “Managed Health Care” plans such as HMOs and PPOs often require authorization before they provide reimbursement for mental health services. These plans are often limited to short-term treatment approaches designed to work out specific problems that interfere with a person’s usual level of functioning. It may be necessary to seek approval for more therapy after a certain number of sessions. While much can be accomplished in short-term therapy, many patients feel that they need more services after insurance benefits end.

You should also be aware that your contract with your health insurance company requires that I provide it with information relevant to the services that I provide to you. I am required to provide a clinical diagnosis. Sometimes I am required to provide additional clinical information such as treatment plans or summaries, or copies of your entire Clinical Record. In such situations, I will make every effort to release only the minimum information about you that is necessary for the purpose requested. This information will become part of the insurance company files and will probably be stored in a computer. Though all insurance companies claim to keep such information confidential, I have no control over what they do with it once it is in their hands. In some cases, they may share the information with a national medical information databank. I will provide you with a copy of any report I submit, if you request it. By signing this Agreement, you agree that I can provide requested information to your carrier.

Once we have all of the information about your insurance coverage, we will discuss what we can expect to accomplish with the benefits that are available and what will happen if they run out before you feel ready to end your sessions. It is important to remember that you always have the right to pay for my services yourself to avoid the problems described above.

Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this document and agree to abide by its terms during our professional relationship.

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Name

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Date

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