



## Client Information and Policies

Welcome to my psychology practice. Your first visit to a new counselor or therapist is very important, and you may have many questions. This document is to introduce myself and give you information to help you decide whether we can work together. Please take time to read this carefully and let me know if you have any questions or need more information. I will give you a separate agreement document; when you sign it, it will represent an agreement between us that you and I will both abide by these policies.

### My Qualifications and Approach

I'm a New York State licensed psychologist (license # 015622) in independent practice in Ithaca, NY. I have a broad range of clinical experience with adults and older adolescents in private practice, college counseling, community mental health, and hospital settings. I have also worked as a college professor and clinic director. My areas of special training and expertise include women's and gender issues, anti-racist multicultural counseling, interpersonal communication and conflict resolution, and human sexuality. I earned my Ph.D. in counseling psychology in 1995 from the University of Missouri-Columbia and completed my pre-doctoral internship at the Student Counseling Service of Iowa State University. Both of these programs were accredited by the American Psychological Association. I also have certifications as a volunteer mediator with CDRC (Community Dispute Resolution Center), a facilitator and trainer of facilitators with AVP (the Alternatives to Violence Project), a Level 1 Practitioner with LifeForce Yoga, and a yoga teacher with the Kripalu Center. As a counseling psychologist, I see you as another person like me with struggles and challenges, and I can guide you because I've learned skills—not because I'm perfect and have no problems. I use the terms “counseling” and “psychotherapy” interchangeably, as well as the terms “counselor” and “psychotherapist.” I help people with a broad range of issues, including (but not limited to) women's and men's gender issues; transgender emergence; minority stress, stigma, and discrimination; interpersonal communication and conflict resolution; depression; anxiety; anger issues; human sexuality; sexual orientation; stress management; vocational, educational, and life stage transition planning; trauma, abuse, and victimization; and family, relationship, and parenting challenges.

I'm committed to professional practice that is strength-based, culturally responsive, and socially just. I take an active approach in sessions and use a variety of techniques in therapy, trying to find what will work best for you. My approach to counseling is a blend of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Nonviolent Communication (NVC), Feminist Therapy (FT), anti-racist multicultural counseling (MC) and body-centered therapy. CBT helps people learn to change how they think, so they can feel and act better even when the situation does not change. NVC is a philosophy that everyone's feelings and needs matter, and an approach to communication that blends assertive self-expression with empathic listening. Feminist Therapy is a philosophy of psychotherapy which looks at the relationship of gender, power, and cultural forces in determining a person's developmental experiences and the problems they are bringing to therapy. MC recognizes that the totality and interrelationships of experiences and contexts (individual, group, and universal) must be the focus of treatment. Body-centered therapy recognizes that our bodies, minds, and feelings are all connected, and changes in what we do with our bodies can help us feel better emotionally as well as physically. If you would like to learn more about my approaches, I have books and handouts about them that I can lend to you. Some of the specific techniques I use include active listening, validation and normalization, cognitive restructuring, behavioral activation, systematic desensitization, communication skills development, psychoeducation, bibliotherapy, values clarification, career exploration, relaxation, meditation, and guided visualization.



## The Process of Getting Started with Individual Counseling

My spouse, George Dillmann, works with me as my practice manager, so he answers the phone, does scheduling and billing, and handles all the business end of my work. George and I are informal and invite you to call us by our first names, but if you feel uncomfortable doing that, you may call us “Dr. Cohen” and “Mr. Dillmann.”

During our first meetings, I will assess whether I can be of benefit to you. I do not accept clients who I believe I cannot be helpful to, and if this is the case, I will do my best to find others who work well with your particular issues to refer you to. I also invite you to assess whether you feel comfortable with me and get the sense that I will be a “good fit” for your needs. Within a reasonable period of time after starting counseling, we will discuss your goals and objectives for counseling, my working understanding of your issues, my proposed plan to help you reach your therapy goals, and possible outcomes of counseling. If you have questions about any methods I suggest or use during your counseling, their possible risks, my expertise in using them, or about the therapy plan in general, please ask me. You also have the right to ask about other possible treatments for your condition and their risks and benefits. If I think you could benefit from any mental health services that I do not provide, I’ll try to help you obtain them.

## Benefits and Risks of Psychotherapy

Benefits of therapy have been shown by scientists in hundreds of well-designed research studies. People who are depressed may find their mood lifting. Others may no longer be troubled by extreme fears, anger problems, or anxieties. In counseling, people have a chance to talk things out fully until their feelings are relieved or the problems are solved. Clients’ relationships and coping skills may improve greatly. They may get more satisfaction out of social and family relationships. Their personal identities, goals, and values may become clearer. They may grow in many directions—as persons, in their close relationships, in their work or schooling, and in the ability to enjoy their lives. Therefore, I will enter our relationship with optimism about our progress.

Therapy also has potential emotional risks. Approaching feelings or thoughts that you have tried not to think about for a long time may be painful. I may challenge some of your assumptions or perceptions or propose different ways of thinking about or handling situations that may bring up emotions such as upset, anger, or disappointment. Attempting to resolve issues that brought you into counseling may result in changes you didn’t originally intend. Psychotherapy may result in decisions to change behaviors, employment, substance use, schooling, housing, or relationships. Change can sometimes be quick and easy, but more often it can be gradual and even frustrating. There is no guarantee that psychotherapy will yield positive or intended results. Although most people who take these risks find that counseling is helpful, it is important that you consider carefully whether these risks are worth the benefits to you of changing.

## Importance of Not Having Multiple Relationships

Although counseling may seem similar to friendship, it is different. Therapy works because of clearly defined roles, rights, and responsibilities held by each person. This frame helps to create the safety for you to take risks and the support for you to become empowered to change. As your therapist, I can’t also be your close friend, your business partner or associate, or have a sexual or romantic relationship with you. If I were to have any of those relationships with you in addition to having the counseling relationship with you, it could impair my objectivity, clinical judgment, or therapeutic effectiveness, or could be exploitative of you. It is possible that during the course of your therapy, I may become aware of other preexisting relationships that may affect our work together, and I will do my best to resolve these situations ethically, but this may entail our needing to stop working together, depending upon the type of conflict.



## Basic Information about Sessions with Me

My standard counseling sessions are scheduled for 45 minutes. I schedule time for myself between sessions to create and review notes, return phone calls, etc. If you are running late for your appointment, please phone me as soon as you can to let me know. If you are late, we will still end our session on time, and not run over into my planning time or the next person's session. If I'm ever unable to start on time, I ask your understanding, and also assure you that I'll give you the full time agreed to (if I can't meet for our full session time right then, I'll offer you extra time at the soonest time that works for both of us).

My fees are currently \$150 for standard counseling sessions and \$200 for initial sessions. At such time as I raise my fees, I will give you several months advance notice. When I offer therapeutic groups or psychoeducational workshops, I separately publish my fees for those offerings.

George and I request that you do not bring children with you if they are young and need babysitting or supervision, which we cannot provide. We don't have toys or children's reading materials in our waiting room, although we do have a wireless hot spot.

We will have to charge you for any damage to, or theft of, property in this office by you or anyone for whom you are legally responsible. Although our office is in a very low-traffic, safe location, we cannot be responsible for any personal property or valuables you bring into our office.

## Cancellations, No-Shows, and Lateness

An appointment is a commitment to our work, and a cancelled appointment delays our work. Please prioritize our appointments, even if our work is emotionally challenging, because that work is important. When you must cancel, please give me as much notice as you can. I reserve the right to charge for appointments cancelled with less than 24 hours' notice, as well as for no-shows. My charge for the business interruption of missed sessions is \$60, which is far less than my full session fee, but it is **not** simply your co-pay or co-insurance amount. It's important for you to know that insurance companies **will not** pay for missed sessions, so you yourself will be responsible for any of those \$60 business interruption charges.

That being said, however, there are circumstances in which I will waive the missed session charge. If you have a contagious illness, I'd **prefer** that you cancel, both to take care of yourself and to avoid potentially spreading your illness! Of course in that situation I won't charge you. Otherwise, though, if you cancel with short notice, or you don't show up for your appointment, I'll phone you to talk with you about the circumstances. If we can find a time to reschedule before the weekend, I'll waive your missed session fee, although if you no-show or cancel the rescheduled appointment, I will charge you for that second missed session. **If we agree** that something unavoidable and unpredictable prevented you from keeping your appointment, I'll generally waive your fee. If that happens on a frequent or repeated basis, though, I am less likely to be able to waive your fee, and I'd like for us to talk about whether you are able to commit to remaining in therapy at this time.

Normally, we make appointment reminder calls on the business day prior to each appointment; however, we are occasionally unable to make such calls. Please be aware that reminder calls are simply a courtesy. If you do not receive a call, you are still responsible for keeping your scheduled appointment.



## Health Insurance

As of January 2021, my practice accepts the following insurance carriers: Aetna, Empire Plan/Beacon Options (formerly Value Options), Excellus Blue Cross/Blue Shield and some other BCBS plans, MultiPlan (Ithaca College insurance), and Medicare. I am not a participating provider with Medicaid. Please note that each carrier may offer several different plans, and that my practice may not accept all of those plans. Also note that many insurance companies provide some payments to out-of-network providers, but how much out-of-network coverage they provide varies widely.

If you wish to use your health insurance for your counseling, call my office to provide your insurance information. George will check with your insurance plan to find out whether the plan will pay for therapy with me, what its coverage rates will be, and what portions of the rate you would be responsible for. In order for me to be “in network” with any insurance company, I have to agree to accept their reimbursement rate as full payment, even though it is generally less than my published fee, and I must “write off” the difference. In order to cover my expenses, I cannot accept less than \$70/session, so if your insurance plan reimburses at less than that amount, you will not be able to work with me using your insurance. In that case, you can decide whether to pay for my services out of pocket, or to seek services elsewhere.

Most clients prefer to use their health insurance for their sessions with me. However, there are risks as well as benefits associated with using health insurance. Insurance companies only reimburse for psychotherapy when you have been assigned at least one reimbursable mental health diagnosis. You may prefer to avoid being labeled with a diagnosed “mental illness.” In addition, insurance companies decide which “illnesses” they will cover, and they do not reimburse all conditions that may be the focus of psychotherapy (such as relationship conflict and bereavement). Some insurance plans may limit how many sessions per year you are allowed. Also, you may prefer to avoid the risk of “having a paper trail.” Submitting a mental health invoice for reimbursement carries some risk to confidentiality, privacy, or future eligibility to obtain health or life insurance or to obtain certain types of employment. When I submit a claim to your insurance company in order to get paid by them, I must communicate your diagnosis, the date and length of our appointments, and what services were provided. Some insurance plans may also require me to send regular reports regarding your progress. While insurance companies claim to keep this information confidential, I have no control over the information once it leaves my office. I will not charge you for my time spent making routine reports to your insurance company. However, I will have to bill you for any extra-long or complex reports the company might require. The insurance company will not cover this fee.

Two “silver linings of the cloud” of using health insurance are that your cost for each therapy session is generally less than if you were paying out of pocket, and if you itemize deductions on your tax return, fees you pay for therapy services that are not reimbursed by insurance may be deductible as medical expenses.

## Payments and Financial Arrangements

I expect you to pay your portion at the start of each session unless you’ve made other arrangements. If you’re using health insurance, that means any deductible, co-payment, and co-insurance required by your health policy. If you’re paying out of pocket, that means my full fee, unless you have made other arrangements with me. I am willing to offer some fee reductions, based on income and circumstances, for current clients who are experiencing life transitions. If my fee is a concern, please discuss it with me. If I’m unable to accommodate your financial situation, I’ll provide you with referrals.



**Forms of Payment:** We accept cash and checks, but we are unable to take credit cards at this time. George is usually in the office to accept your payment and give you a receipt; I suggest you arrive a few minutes early for this. When he's not in the office, you'll give your payment directly to me.

**If you're using health insurance:** We offer you the courtesy of submitting claims to your insurance company on your behalf, whether I am in network as a participating provider or not, and George will vigorously pursue payment from your insurance company if they delay, deny, or "lose" claims. However, if his diligent efforts to receive insurance payment fail after three months of attempts, he will send you a bill for the sessions that the insurance company refused to pay for. (This may be after you have stopped coming to therapy sessions with me.) Ultimately, you—not your insurance company or any other person or company—are responsible for paying the fees we agree upon. If you ask me to bill a separated spouse, parent or other relative, or an insurance company, and I do not receive payment on time, I will then expect this payment from you.

**Late payments and balances:** I understand that sometimes you may forget your checkbook or for some other reason not pay at the time of a session. Please pay the next time you come. George will check your account at the end of each month. If he finds that you've forgotten or neglected to pay for any sessions, he'll send you a bill at the beginning of the next month. We expect you to pay that bill within two weeks. If we don't receive payment from you by then, George will send a second bill with a late fee of \$10 added to cover our administrative costs. If you don't pay that within two weeks, he'll add a second late fee of \$20 in the next bill, for a total late fee of \$30 to cover our administrative costs. I do not permit clients to carry a balance any longer than two months and if you are unable to pay your balance, we will discuss whether it makes sense to refer you or develop another strategy so that you can avoid incurring additional debt. Please let me know if any problem arises during the course of therapy regarding your ability to make timely payments.

**"Library fines" fees:** From time to time, I lend books, magazines, videos, or CDs to clients. If you borrow an item and don't return it by the end of the lending period you and I agree upon, George or I will contact you to remind you to bring it with you. If you fail to return the item after repeated reminders, we will bill you for the full cost of replacing the item at regular retail price.

**Fees for telephone and legal consultations:** If I need to have long (more than 10 minutes) telephone conferences with other professionals as part of your therapy, I will bill you for these at the same rate as for regular therapy services. Unfortunately, insurance will not reimburse for those services. If you become involved in legal proceedings that require my participation, I will expect you to pay for my professional time and services. Because of the difficulty of legal involvement and the interruption to my regular practice, I charge \$200 per hour for preparation and attendance at any legal proceeding. I will provide bills/receipts at the end of each session and expect to be paid upon receipt unless otherwise agreed upon.

## Termination and Follow-Up

As I see it, deciding when to stop our work together ("termination") works best as a mutual process. As you're starting to feel better, we may gradually "phase out" by meeting less frequently. Whether we take that approach or not, I recommend that we have closure on the therapy process with a termination session. In that last session, we'll reflect back on what you've learned and how you've changed, anticipate potential future challenges, and plan how to deal with them. We'll also decide whether you want to fully end your work with me—and if so, how to be able to tell if or when you might need to come back for another course of therapy—or whether you'd rather have regularly scheduled "check-in" appointments with me. There are several situations in which one of us might decide unilaterally to end our work together.



- Although I believe it's best for us to decide together when to end counseling, you do have the right to terminate therapy at any time. If you choose to do that, I will offer to provide you with names of other qualified professionals whose services you might prefer.
- If I get the sense that I'm not helping you reach your therapeutic goals, I'll discuss this with you. If we aren't able to change the course of our work to be more effective, I may recommend that we end therapy, and give you referrals that may be of more help to you.
- If you fail to pay or refuse to pay for services after a reasonable time, I reserve the right to terminate your therapy. (If you begin having difficulty paying for services, I'll be happy to discuss the possibility of setting up a payment plan.)
- If you commit violence to, verbally or physically threaten or harass me, the office or anyone in it, or my family, I reserve the right to terminate your treatment unilaterally and immediately.

If, after your counseling with me, you start working with another therapist, I would be happy to help you with the transition by talking to your new psychotherapist (with your written permission only).

## Phone Calls, Emergencies, and Emails

**Administrative matters:** Please call my office to reschedule appointments or for other administrative matters. When we're in the office, George will answer the phone unless he's on another call or away from his desk, in which case you can leave a voice mail. Please don't email me in order to cancel appointments, because I may miss your note. For scheduling or rescheduling appointments, it works best to speak with one of us directly on the phone, although you may email George about other administrative matters.

**Clinical issues:** If you need to contact me between sessions about a clinical matter, please phone me; if I'm not available to take your call, leave a message with George or on voice mail. I generally do not take calls when I'm with a client, but I'll return your message as soon as I can, generally within the next day except weekends and holidays. Clinical phone consultations of five minutes or less are normally free. However, if we spend more than ten minutes in a week on the phone, or if I spend more than ten minutes listening to messages from you, or reading and responding to emails or coordination of care, I will bill you on a prorated basis for that time. Unfortunately, insurance won't pay for those services. If you feel the need for many phone calls and cannot wait for your next appointment, we may need to schedule more sessions to address your needs.

**If I Need to Contact Someone about You:** If there is an emergency during our work together, or I become concerned about your personal safety, I am required by law and by the rules of my profession to contact someone close to you—perhaps a relative, spouse, or close friend. I am also required to contact this person if I become concerned about your harming someone else. In such cases, I will contact the person you wrote down as your emergency contact on the Client Information and Contact Form. If, in my reasonable professional judgment, I believe that you are *likely* to engage in conduct that will result in serious harm to yourself or others, I am required to report this to the local Director of Community Services, unless in my reasonable professional judgment a report would endanger me or would increase the danger to the potential victim or victims.

**After hours and emergency calls:** We check messages frequently when out of the office, such as during evenings and weekends, so you can always call the office number. In your message, please let me know if you're hoping for a quick return call, or if my return call can wait. I'll return your call as soon as I can, but that may be several hours later or the next morning, so if your situation is an emergency and you need to talk to someone right away, call All Hours Connect at 607-272-1838, or go to your nearest emergency room. All Hours Connect is the crisis counseling service which I have a contract with for back-up coverage. It's a special service of SPCS in which the crisis counseling is provided by highly trained staff members instead of regular crisis line volunteers.



**When I'm not available:** If I am planning on being out of town, I'll generally be able to check my messages remotely. If I'm going to a remote location where I cannot check messages or make phone calls, I'll let you know that so you can instead call my back-up coverage service, All Hours Connect.

## Confidentiality and Its Limits

I will treat with great care all the information you share with me. It is your legal right that our sessions and my records about you be kept private—that's what "confidentiality" means. That is why I ask you to sign a "Release of Information Authorization Form" before I can talk about you or send my records about you to anyone else. In general, I will tell no one what you tell me. I will not even reveal that you are receiving services from me. More details about confidentiality are in the Notice of Privacy Practices which I've also given you.

As you know, my spouse works with me as my practice manager. George and I will always maintain your privacy. We make every effort to keep the names and records of clients private. We will try never to use your last name on the telephone, if clients in the office can overhear it. George is trained in how to keep client records confidential. In order to bill your insurance, George has to have access to information such as clients' diagnoses, but I don't talk with him about my client's personal issues that they discuss with me in our therapy sessions, and I don't let him read my psychotherapy notes.

**Running into Each Other in Public:** Because Ithaca is a small town, we may have situations in which we cross paths in public or in a social gathering. Our policy in those situations is to allow you, the client, to decide IF and TO WHAT EXTENT, you wish to acknowledge either of us. If either of us run into you, we have no idea if you are standing next to the nosey coworker or family member, and we don't want to place you in a position in which you might uncomfortably have to answer questions about how you know us. But we also want you to know that we aren't avoiding speaking to you because we don't like you or are embarrassed. We will smile and nod to you the way we smile and nod to strangers as we walk down the street. If you choose to say hello, that is your choice—neither of us will be hurt if you don't! But please also don't begin speaking with me about your personal therapy while we are in a public place. You may also happen to recognize someone else in my waiting room; I also ask you not to disclose the name or identity of any other client being seen in this office.

In all but a few rare situations, your confidentiality (that is, the privacy between you and I) is protected by federal and state laws and by the rules of my profession. **Here are the most common cases in which confidentiality is not legally protected:**

1. If you were sent to me by a court or an employer for evaluation or treatment, the court or employer expects a report from me. If this is your situation, please talk with me before you tell me anything you do not want the court or your employer to know. You have a right to tell me only what you are comfortable with telling.
2. Are you suing someone or being sued? Are you involved in divorce, child custody, or adoption proceedings? Are you being charged with a crime? If so, and you tell the court that you are seeing me, I may then be ordered to show the court my records. Please consult your lawyer about these issues.
3. If you make a serious threat to harm yourself or another person, the law requires me to try to protect you or that other person. This usually means telling others about the threat. I cannot promise never to tell others about threats you make.
4. If I believe a child has been or will be abused or neglected, I am legally required to report this to the authorities.

**I need your blanket consent for these exceptions to confidentiality:** I ask now for your understanding about the following situations. By signing the consent form, you agree to the following.



1. If you ever call my back-up coverage service, All Hours Connect, they will send me let me know that you contacted them, and I may have a conversation with their therapist who spoke with you. Of course, everyone at All Hours Connect is bound by the same laws and rules as I am to protect your confidentiality.
2. I sometimes consult other therapists or other professionals about my clients. This helps me keep my work of high quality. These persons are also required to keep your information private. But generally, these persons don't even know who you are, because when I consult, I don't give them your name or identifying information; I only tell them as much as they need to know to understand your situation and advise me.
3. I also want you to know that I have contracts with an IT company, companies that provide us with practice management software and web hosting for it, and another company through which the practice management software submits bills electronically to insurance companies. As required by HIPAA, I have a formal business associate contract with these businesses in which they promise to maintain the confidentiality of all information as specifically allowed in the contract or otherwise required by law. If you wish, I can provide you with the names of these organizations and/or a blank copy of this contract.
4. If I become unable to work due to illness, disability, or other presently unforeseen circumstances, George or some professional colleague I designate will notify you and help arrange for care for you. Your records will be transferred to another therapist who will assure their confidentiality, preservation, and appropriate access.

**When you might want me to release your confidential information:** If either of us think it would be beneficial to you for me to communicate with any other professional(s) you're working with or anyone else, let's discuss it. If you agree to this, you will need to sign a Release of Information Authorization form. This form states exactly what information is to be shared, with whom, and why, and it also sets time limits. You may read this form at any time. If you have questions, please ask me.

**Reviewing your own records:** Some clients are surprised that I take notes about our counseling sessions. I'm actually required to keep records of my professional contact with you by my professional standards and ethics. This includes insurance and billing records as well as notes about our sessions or other professional contacts. You can review your own records in my files at a time that's mutually convenient to both of us. You may ask me to add to them or correct them, and you can have copies of them. I ask you to understand and agree that you may not examine records created by anyone else and then sent to me. In some very rare situations, I may temporarily remove parts of your records before you see them. This would happen if I believe that the information will be harmful to you, but I will discuss this with you.

## Complaints

Problems can arise in our relationship, just as in any other relationship. If you have a concern or complaint about your counseling, please talk with me about it. I will take your criticism seriously and respond with care and respect. If you believe that I've been unwilling to listen and respond, or that I have behaved unethically, you can contact New York's Professional Misconduct Enforcement System Complaint Hotline at 1-800-442-8106 or email them at [conduct@nysed.gov](mailto:conduct@nysed.gov). To read more about this, visit the website at <http://www.op.nysed.gov/opd/>.

You are also free to discuss your complaints about me with anyone you wish, and you do not have any responsibility to maintain confidentiality about what I do that you don't like, since you are the person who has the right to decide what you want kept confidential.

## Concluding Statement

Please let me know if you have concerns or questions about any of these policies and procedures or this agreement for working together in psychotherapy.