

Informed Consent for Long-Term Psychotherapy Regarding a Case Monitor, Medical Care, and Termination Plans

Psychotherapy that lasts for more than twenty sessions or six months necessarily involves an ongoing relationship between you and your therapist. One of the purposes of long-term, intensive psychotherapy is to allow your past emotional patterns to emerge and to be understood as they affect current relationships, particularly the therapeutic relationship. If there is the possibility that early or deep trauma of any kind affected your development, then as a part of your therapy you may need to review or to reexperience the emotions that were attached to that trauma.

Experience with revived memories of early abuse, deprivation, and trauma tells us that these memories are usually confusing, frightening, and/or upsetting. Experience in psychotherapy further tells us that such early memories are not usually recorded only in ordinary recollections, pictures of the events, or stories, but *in the ways we experience relationships and in various muscles and tissues of our bodies*. Thus, when these memories emerge in the here and now to be looked at they will be manifest in the ways you experience your therapist and/or the ways you experience your body and mind in reaction to therapy or to the therapeutic relationship.

There are three main dangers of intensive, long-term, relational psychotherapy:

1. You may begin to experience your therapist as somehow frightening, dangerous, neglectful, or not “on your side” in some way in the therapy process.

2. You may experience body reactions that represent early memories—such as agitation, distress, apathy, addictions, depression, eating and sleep difficulties, confusion, suspiciousness, or other physical symptoms intruding into your life in various ways.

3. You may feel a strong urge to flee, emotionally or physically, from your therapy so as to avoid further emergence of bad memories or negative experiences.

Psychotherapists have developed standard ways of addressing these three potential dangers:

1. There may come a time when your confidence in your therapist or in the therapeutic process begins to get shaky. It is important that you first bring this up with your therapist and then, if your concerns continue, to arrange with him or her to seek out a third-party professional case monitor or consultant with whom to discuss your misgivings. Your therapist will help you locate a mental health professional who is familiar with this kind of work and who can listen carefully to what problems are coming up with your therapist or with the therapy process and make appropriate suggestions and recommendations. If your therapist at any time believes your emotional reactions are threatening to you or to your therapy in any way, he or she will insist that you immediately consult a mutually agreed-upon case monitor.

2. An increase in any physical symptoms or adverse emotional reactions during the course of long-term psychotherapy usually signals the emergence of early traumatic memories. For your well-being and safety, it may be essential for you to have immediate medical and/or psychiatric evaluation and to remain under the care of a physician for a period of time. If your therapist at any time feels that the physical or mental reactions emerging in the course of treatment may potentially endanger you in any way, he or she will insist that you go immediately for medical and/or psychiatric consultation.

3. Should you wish to terminate treatment before you and your therapist mutually agree upon a beneficial time, it may be that you are unconsciously wanting to avoid the emergence of long-hidden traumatic memories. For example, you may experience your therapist as somehow failing you, as repeating previous insults or abuse to you, or as not being interested in you, not being emotionally available, not understanding you, or not liking you. You may then abruptly want to

stop seeing your therapist in order to avoid the emotional pain and/or perceived dangers of dealing with these issues. Your first remedy would likely be to consult a mutually agreed-upon case monitor (as specified in item 1, above) in order to discuss the issues coming up with your therapist or your therapy process. A part of this consultation will be that your therapist and case monitor will communicate with each other about the relevant issues. Additionally, it is of crucial importance that you be willing to continue at least five to ten therapy sessions so that you, your therapist, and your case monitor can adequately discuss your reasons for wanting to stop therapy and try to reach a joint understanding of what these reasons may mean to you and to your ongoing therapy process. If your therapist feels your decision to terminate therapy is abrupt or may be related to the revival of early traumatic memories, he or she may, in your best interest, insist that you consult a case monitor and then continue for a series of five to ten additional sessions before terminating.

Informed Consent Agreement

I have read the above considerations for entering into long-term, in-depth relational psychotherapy. I understand that certain dangers may be expected to appear over time in relational therapy. I have discussed the dangers and the usual safeguards listed above with my therapist so that I understand them. If any of the above conditions occur—(1) the loss of confidence in the therapy or the therapist, (2) the emergence or increase of physical or mental symptoms, or (3) the wish to terminate before a mutually agreed-upon time—I **agree to abide by the three safeguards listed above, that is (1) to consult with a third-party professional case monitor, (2) to consult with a medical/psychiatric practitioner, and/or (3) to attend five to ten regular termination sessions.**

I further understand that this informed consent and other written requests that my therapist may make from time to time pertaining to my well-being and safety must be agreed upon in order to enter further

into or to continue long-term psychotherapy. Failure to comply with any requirements that are designed to safeguard me and my therapy process will be grounds for my therapist to give me a five to ten sessions notice of termination. This agreement supplements previous informed consents.

Client Signed Date

Therapist Signed Date

[This form is reprinted from Hedges, L. E., *Terrifying Transferences: Aftershocks of Childhood Trauma*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2000.]