

*Mary Beth George, MEd, LPC, Certified Gottman Therapist*

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**Informed Consent and Practice Policies**

Thank you for choosing me to help you at this time. I am both a Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC) in the state of Texas, Certified Gottman Therapist (CGT) for couples counseling and Master Trainer and Consultant for the Gottman Institute. The licenses I hold allow me to provide therapy services to individuals and couples. I work with people with a variety of concerns and issues and am a sole practitioner. I have received extensive training to help couples achieve greater love and health in their relationship from the Gottman Institute and earned the designation of Certified Gottman Therapist. Please read through this disclosure statement carefully and ask me about anything you don't understand. I will work with you to the best of my ability to help facilitate positive changes in your life.

**Counseling Process and Relationship** – I believe that counseling is an interactive process between client and therapist. Participation in counseling involves active listening by both counselor and client, honesty by both parties and openly discussing concerns about the counseling process. Effective counseling requires that the client and the counselor develop a healthy relationship with clear boundaries. I believe that each client is an individual with unique concerns, strengths and values. Please know that I am a professional that is committed to your welfare.

It is important to understand that we have a professional relationship. Contacts, other than chance meetings will be limited to scheduled appointments. If I see you in a public setting, in an effort to protect your confidentiality, I will wait for you to speak to me before I acknowledge you.

In our initial session we will discuss your presenting concerns, your history and the goals you want to achieve in counseling. If you are coming in for couple's counseling, the couple is considered to be the client and I will meet with both of you (see more about couples counseling below).

Initially, counseling often results in the client experiencing uncomfortable feelings or thoughts. Because some issues are painful to deal with, things sometimes seem to get harder before they get better. This experience may affect the client's relationship with family members, spouse, or other significant relationships.

The number of sessions that will be needed will depend upon a variety of circumstances. Each person moves at a different pace and each person's struggles are unique. Some clients may require only a few sessions to reach their goals, while others may take several months or possibly longer. You, the client, are responsible for choosing to continue or to terminate therapy at any time. When you are ready to terminate therapy please allow at least one session so we can have closure. If you find that my particular style of therapy does not meet your needs, please feel free to ask for referrals to other therapists.

**Couples Counseling:** I have received advanced training in Gottman Method™ Couples Counseling and have earned the designation of Certified Gottman Therapist and am a Master Trainer and Consultant for The Gottman Institute. Gottman Method Couples Therapy is based on years of scientific research by Dr. John Gottman. If you come in for couple's counseling, our work together will include helping you learn skills that will deepen the friendship and intimacy in your relationship, help you productively manage conflict so you can compromise regarding resolvable problems and dialogue about perpetual issues and help you create shared meaning in your relationship.

My process for working with couples includes an assessment phase that has three parts. At the first session, we will discuss your areas of concern, the history of your relationship and your goals for treatment. Each person will fill out a confidential online assessment that will help me understand your relationship further. The assessment was created by the Gottman Institute. The Gottman Institute maintains HIPAA compliance for any personal health information by using 256-bit SSL encryption for a secure connection. No personally identifiable health information is ever transmitted via email. The software the site runs on is actively monitored and kept up-to-date with prompt application of the latest security patches. There is a cost of \$29 for taking and scoring the assessment, which is not covered by insurance. The online assessment is a therapeutic tool that I utilize for creating the treatment plan needed to best help you. It will not be part of the clinical record and is not available to either party because it meant to be read and interpreted by a trained professional. After you have both completed the online assessment, I will meet with you each individually to learn your personal histories, discuss your individual perspectives and feelings and explore some of your areas of concern on the online assessment. Based on that initial session, the online assessment material you complete and your individual sessions, in our third session, I will present you with some recommendations for treatment and we will define some mutually agreed upon goals.

In addition to standard 45-50 minute sessions for couples, I offer extended sessions and marathon therapy. Extended sessions can range in time based on schedules and can be ideal for getting just a little more accomplished than a standard session allows. Sometimes extended sessions can be covered by insurance.

Marathon or Intensive Couples Therapy is designed for couples to change the trajectory of their relationship in a shorter period of time than traditional counseling. This method is ideal for couples coming from a distance from Kingwood, couples who have difficulty setting aside time for weekly appointments, highly distressed couples and couples desiring a more urgent and intensive approach for their issues. Marathon Couples Therapy can be done over the course of 2-3 days or several consecutive days, depending on what works best for the couple. The benefit of this type of therapy is

that it builds momentum rapidly with regard to the therapy process, allowing for breakthroughs to be made in a shorter period of time. If you are interested in either extended or marathon therapy, feel free to discuss those options with me.

**Basic Fees** - My fee is \$125 for a 45-50 minute session and \$225 for a 90 minute session (the initial session is \$150). Payment by cash, check or major credit card is due at the time of your session. Other fees apply for various services, such as copying records, written reports and assessments. Failure to keep your account current may result in legal action or collection agency intervention. **Initial** \_\_\_\_\_

**Forensic Rates** - Infrequently, you or another person may seek to compel me to testify in court. My fee for such testimony is \$500.00 per any portion of an hour for court testimony or deposition. Waiting time and local travel time will be charged at \$125.00 per any portion of an hour. In the event that less than 24-hour notice is given for a change in the court schedule, a fee of \$750 will be incurred. For out-of-area court appearance, all transportation and lodging expenses must be paid in advance. Records review, consultation with clients, litigants, attorneys (in person or via phone), reports, or any other service provided plus time spent adjusting schedule or any business disruption will be charged at the rate of \$125.00 per hour or prorated accordingly. **Initial** \_\_\_\_\_

**Cancellation and Missed Appointments** - Since scheduling an appointment involves reserving a time specifically for you, a **24-hour advance notice** is required for cancellations (except in the case of an emergency). If you cancel less than 24 hours before your appointment, you will be considered a NO SHOW for that visit and you will be charged the FULL FEE for that session. *Once you have two NO SHOW appointments, you will be required to secure any subsequent appointments with a credit card. Subsequent NO SHOW appointments will be charged the FULL FEE for the missed session.* **Initial** \_\_\_\_\_

**Insurance** – If you are requesting that I bill your insurance, please fill out the Insurance Authorization and Release completely. If I am “in network” with your insurance company, my fee is reduced based on my contracted rate with your insurance company. You will be responsible for paying your copay at the time of service. It is important and your responsibility that you contact your insurance company to find out whether your benefits allow for individual, couple, family or telehealth counseling and what the limits of your benefits are since ultimately you are responsible for payment of your therapy costs. **You are responsible for all fees not covered or reimbursed by your insurance benefits**, including but not limited to, deductibles, co-payments, missed appointments, late cancellations, correspondence/reports, assessments or services not approved by your plan. If you have not obtained insurance information by the time of our first session, I will charge you the contracted rate allowed by your insurance company until we obtain information regarding your benefits. If I am not a provider for your insurance plan, you may have out-of-network benefits. If you have such benefits, I can provide you with a receipt that you may submit to your insurance so that you can request reimbursement. Please be aware that I utilize the service of a billing agent to file claims with insurance companies. Some individuals choose not to use their insurance for various reasons. Please understand that if you choose not to use your insurance, I will not go back and bill previous sessions if you change your mind. **Initial** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone Accessibility** – I make every effort to respond to my messages within 24-48 hours. Calls are returned during normal business hours. Because technical difficulties do sometimes occur, please call again if you do not receive a return phone call by the end of the next business day.

**Emergency Care** - If you are experiencing an emergency and need to talk to someone immediately, call 911, a crisis line (such as MHMRA 866-970-4770) or go to the nearest emergency room. Please be aware that when I am out of town there is no on-call back-up for my practice.

**Electronic Communication/Telehealth** - Please be aware that email and texting are not secure means for communicating information. Thus, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed through these means and it is best that you limit their use to scheduling issues. If you do send an email or text with other information, I will read it but will most likely wait until your scheduled appointment to respond to the content. If you initiate communication via email or text, it will indicate your permission to communicate via these methods and you will assume the risk. If you pay via credit card, please be advised that automatic electronic receipts and giving “feedback” are also not considered secure, so I have turned off these options on Square Up. If you choose to pay via Venmo, please note that I have set my privacy setting to “private” and you will need to do the same in order to use that service. In some situations, conducting therapy sessions telephonically or online may be appropriate. If we engage in telephonic or online therapy then you are responsible for securing your own environment to ensure confidentiality. You need to find a location where you are alone and it is often helpful to use headphones when online. Additionally, if we engage in telephonic or online therapy we both mutually agree to not record session content. **Initial** \_\_\_\_\_

**Social Networking/Media** – If you choose to participate in the various forms of social networking/media offered by Couples Counseling and Psychotherapy Associates (i.e. Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram or blog), please understand that your name and/or picture may be visible to others and therefore your identity cannot be protected in these situations. Colleagues, friends and others also participate in these communication tools and distinctions are not made about who is a client and who is not. Choosing to participate is voluntary. These tools will be used by Couples Counseling and Psychotherapy Associates to disseminate general messages and will not address individual client concerns. We reserve the right to remove any follower’s comments or block any individual from participating. Please

