



## **COLLATERAL VISITS QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

### **Who is a collateral?**

A collateral is a spouse or partner, family member or friend who participates in therapy to assist the identified patient. The collateral is not considered to be a patient and is not the subject of the treatment. Psychotherapists have certain legal and ethical responsibilities to their patients and the privacy of this relationship is given legal protection. Our primary responsibility is to our patient and we must place their interests first.

### **What is the role of collaterals in counseling?**

The role of a collateral can vary from case to case. For example, a collateral might attend only one session, either alone or with the patient, to provide information to the psychotherapist. Or, a collateral might attend numerous therapy sessions and the relationship between the patient and the collateral may be one focus of treatment. Our clinicians who work with children and teens often treat them in the context of their family and family members are often included in treatment. Your role in treatment will be discussed in the initial session and other appropriate times.

### **What are the benefits and risks?**

Psychotherapy often generates intense emotional experiences and your participation may provoke strong anxiety or some emotional distress. It may expose or create tension in your relationship with the patient. While your participation can result in better understanding of the patient, improve the relationship and communication, and may even help your own growth and development, there is no guarantee that this will be the case. Psychotherapy is a positive experience for many, but it is not helpful to all people.

### **How are records maintained?**

As a collateral, no record or chart will be maintained on you. However, notes about you may be entered into the patient's chart. The patient has a right to access that chart and the material contained therein. It is sometimes possible to maintain the privacy of your communications with your therapist. If that is your wish, we should discuss it before any information is communicated. You have no right to access the patient's chart without their written consent. You will not have a diagnosis and there is no individualized treatment plan for you.

### **What are the fees during collateral visits?**

As a collateral, you are not responsible for paying for sessions. The identified patient is responsible for paying for our professional services as agreed upon in their *Letter of Understanding* when services began.

### **How is confidentiality maintained?**

The confidentiality of information in the patient's chart, including the information that you provide, is protected by both federal and state law. It can only be released if the patient specifically authorizes the release. Please keep in mind, there are some exceptions to this general rule:

If abuse or neglect of a child or a vulnerable adult is suspected, we are required to file a report with the appropriate agency.

If we believe that you are a danger to yourself (suicidal), we will take actions to protect your life even if we must reveal your identity to do so.

If you threaten serious bodily harm to another (homicidal), we will take necessary actions to protect that person even if we must reveal your identity to do so.

If you, or the patient, is involved in a lawsuit and a judge requires that we submit information or testify, we must comply.

If insurance is used to pay for the treatment, the patient's insurance company may require us to submit information about the treatment for claims-processing purposes or for utilization review.

You are expected to maintain the confidentiality of the patient in your role as a collateral.

### **Is an Authorization for Release of Confidential Information needed?**

The patient is not required to sign an *Authorization for Release of Confidential Information* form to the collateral when a collateral participates in therapy. The presence of the collateral with the consent of the patient is adequate and your provider will note this in the patient's record. This provides assurance that full consent has been given to the clinician for the patient's confidential information to be discussed with the collateral in session.

However, an *Authorization for Release of Confidential Information* from the patient is helpful to the clinician when and if the collateral and the clinician communicate outside of session for one reason or another.

### **Conclusion**

If you have questions about therapy, your provider's procedures or your role in the therapeutic process, please discuss them with the provider. Remember that the best way to assure quality and ethical treatment is to keep communication open and direct with your clinician.