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## SYNERGY COUNSELLING ASSOCIATES LTD. POLICIES FOR SEPARATING AND DIVORCING CLIENTS

Couples and families seek services from helping professionals for various reasons throughout high stress and high conflict periods. Once a couple has decided to separate, they may benefit from receiving help and coaching for the following reasons:

- To rule out any possibility of reconciliation;
- To improve communication and negotiation skills;
- To decrease conflict that impacts family members;
- To explore co-parenting or parallel parenting options;
- To safely explore ways to support their children through the breakdown of the family unit;
- To explore hope and possibility of negotiating differences outside of the legal system.

Clients may self-refer or be recommended to seek support from their legal counsel. In the case of high conflict situations, couples may be mandated to attend meetings with a helping professional. The first step in working with separating/divorcing couples is to ensure that common, achievable goals are identified, and that all parties understand the purpose of the meetings.

It should be noted that many clients going through separation and divorce are hurt and angry. Success in this work requires neutrality of the professional and, therefore, we recommend that clients also seek outside support on an individual basis.

### WHAT SEPARATION/DIVORCING SUPPORT OR CONSULTATION IS:

- IS an opportunity for couples to express themselves respectfully, openly and safely;
- IS an opportunity to decrease the need for legal involvement;
- IS conducted by a professional who is trained to work with couples, thus being able to build rapport, create emotional safety, and model/teach conflict resolution skills;
- IS a way to keep families out of the court room;
- IS an opportunity for parents to discuss what is in the best interest of their child/ren and to consider how they may be impacted by separation/divorce;
- IS a set time and safe space, guided by a neutral party, whereby couples may reach agreements, understanding or compromise in new and more productive ways.

### SEPARATION/DIVORCING SUPPORT OR CONSULTATION IS NOT:

- NOT couples/family or child mental health counselling;
- NOT formal mediation;
- NOT reconciliation counselling;
- NOT an assessment of parents' mental health;
- NOT an opportunity to establish who/what is right and who/what is wrong;
- NOT an assessment of parental capacity;
- NOT an assessment of possible parental alienation;
- NOT intended to reach resolution regarding past hurts and conflicts;
- NOT intended to involve a helping professional to be used in court against an ex-spouse;
- NOT offering a formal "expert opinion" on any matter related to the child's situation;
- NOT guaranteed to be confidential due to collaborative nature of process;
- NOT recommended unless all parties are consenting and can reach consensus with goals;

- NOT a re-unification for estranged parents and children;
- NOT to be used against the child;
- NOT appropriate in the presence of potential family violence;
- NOT a Hear the Child Report.

#### **PRE-REQUISITES FOR SERVICES:**

- Both parties agree to participate in accordance with these policies;
- Both parties agree with the purpose/goals of the services;
- Both parties agree to maintain a certain code of respect while in the office. Verbal, emotional and physical aggression will not be tolerated and will potentially result in termination of services;
- Both parties accept responsibility for payment of retainer and timely payment for sessions, as per policy, unless otherwise specified by a court order or a binding written agreement.

#### **FORMATS FOR THE INTERVIEW**

Typically each party will have one individual session with the counsellor/coach at some point in the initial goal-setting phase; however, generally speaking sessions will be held with all parties together. For the sake of providing all parties with equal access and contact with the counsellor/coach, and in order to maintain neutrality in the process, meetings will only proceed when all scheduled parties are in attendance (see section on cancellation policies).

#### **CANCELLATION POLICIES**

24-hour notification is required, or the usual fee will be charged for any scheduled session. In addition to telephone communication to cancel an appointment, **an email notification is required**. The email will provide documentation of the cancellation and is to be copied to all parties expected to attend the appointment. It is recommended that the cancelling client request an email "read receipt". In the event, that any individual misses the cancellation notification and arrives at the office the meeting will not proceed, and rescheduling will involve all parties.

If any individual fails to attend a scheduled dyad or family meeting or to provide a minimum of 24 hours notice of cancellation, he/she will be personally billed for the entire cost of the scheduled meeting and the meeting will not proceed.

#### **PAYMENT**

The fee is normally paid at the time of each session, by debit, credit card, cheque or cash. Receipts are issued by email or in person, if necessary. Each party will be expected to maintain a current **credit card number on file**. This number **will be charged in your absence if:** a) this is the preferred form of payment, b) if an appointment is missed or cancelled with less than 24 hours notice, c) as payment for services such as telephone consultations and emails. Receipts for such services charged in the client's absence will be sent by email. It is the client's responsibility to keep a current email address on file.

#### **RETAINER**

A retainer of \$1000 will be collected from all parties. This is essentially a deposit that will be held until the termination of services. Professional fees will be deducted from the retainer in the event that an individual's account is left unpaid, or if a payment method is declined. This also includes any NSF fees charged to our office. The complete amount will be refunded at the termination of services, as long as the account is settled.

*E.A.P and insurance programs will not be accepted forms of payment for separating/divorcing clients.*

**CONTACT WITH PARTIES:**

Initials

In order to maximize neutrality on the part of the helping professional, direct contact with either party outside of the scheduled meetings should be limited. Contact should not include efforts to discredit the other party or influence the opinions of the professional. **It is required that all written communication be copied to both parties.** All information being provided by our office is to be available and transparent to both parties. In the event that the counsellor/coach deems appropriate to reply to an email that was not copied to the other party, **the reply will include the original email and it will be copied to other party.** Ideally, all contact between either client and our office will be made with our administrative assistant. Please be mindful that there is a charge for reviewing and replying to email correspondence as per the office fee schedule.

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SIGNATURE

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DATE