

## **CONSENT AND RELEASE OF LIABILITY FOR ANIMAL ASSISTED THERAPY**

Patti P. Dowling, MS, LPC, NCC of Baton Rouge Counseling Associates

Therapy animals can be a vital part of the treatment team. Therefore, I have begun offering Animal Assisted Therapy using my personal Ragdoll breed cat, Mark, born on 9-24-18. I hope that you are comfortable with Mark's presence in your sessions. However, because he is an animal, and not a human, I am responsible for his welfare. In addition, because he is an animal, his behavior cannot always be predictable. Therefore, it is important to discuss in advance the risks and rules needed to insure Mark's and your safety and health, and try to create as safe a working situation as possible. In addition, it is important to provide you with diligent warning about the potential harm that could be present when working with animals.

While I have listed some of these risks below, I cannot foresee all potential problems that may occur. Therefore, by signing this form you are releasing Patti P. Dowling, MS, LPC, NCC from any liability should any injury occur as part of your treatment here.

### **RISKS:**

1. Mark is currently in training; meaning he has not yet been certified to do Animal Assisted Therapy. He still needs to learn some skills to pass certification requirements. During this process, and once he is certified, you may opt to not have him a part of your session. Should you choose, he will stay in his crate for the duration of your session. Please do not feel obligated to have him participate; he loves his crate!
2. Animals have their own natural defenses. While I will do everything possible to prevent any injury, it is possible that he might scratch or bite, if he feels threatened.
3. Animals often use their mouths in play. Therefore, even when playing, it is possible for light biting to occur. When using a toy to play with Mark, he may miss the toy and get your finger. When he realizes this, he releases and does not bite down, but you may still feel his teeth.
4. While Mark has been screened by a veterinarian before commencing to work as a therapy animal, animals do sometimes carry disease. Because your contact is minimal, this risk is very small. Mark is up to date on all of his vaccinations.
5. While Mark is a "hypoallergenic" cat, there may still be risk for allergic reaction. Please let me know if you typically have allergies to animals.
6. Antibacterial hand sanitizer will be used before and after handling Mark.

### **POTENTIAL BENEFITS:** (Animal Assisted Therapy in Counseling; Chandler 2017)

1. Clients may be more motivated to attend and participate in therapy because they desire to spend time with the therapy pet.
2. Clients' focus may be temporarily shifted from painful thoughts and experiences due to interaction with the therapy pet, to the extent that they can work harder or longer in session therefore gaining more benefit.
3. Clients may experience soothing comfort from petting or holding the therapy pet.
4. Clients may receive genuine acceptance by the therapy pet.
5. Clients may be able to form a more trusting relationship with therapists who demonstrate that they can be trusted by the way they interact with the therapy animal.
6. In many instances, based on the unique characteristics of clients' conditions or needs, they may be able to perform activities and goals that would not otherwise be possible without the assistance of the therapy pet.

### **RULES:**

1. Animals have individual rights, just as each client has rights. Therefore, Mark is allowed to determine if and when he participates with others. While it may be planned to have him in session, he will never be forced to do so.

2. Mark has his own quiet space in the office where he can rest, sleep, or just take a quiet break. He should not be disturbed when he is in this area.
3. Mark should always be treated gently. He should never be hit, have his tail or any other parts pulled, be carried or treated in any other way that is uncomfortable to him.
4. Mark will always need me present in any therapeutic situation.
5. If Mark becomes irritated, scared, or in any way acts in a negative manner, I will put him in a safe place. No other person should touch him at these times.
6. Because of the unpredictability of animals in unfamiliar situations, clients may not bring their own animal to be involved in their therapy session.
7. Parents or guardians of children under the age of 10, must remain on the premises during their child's session.

**Please note if client has/had any of the following:**

YES/NO                      Animal allergies (if yes, which animals?) \_\_\_\_\_

YES/NO                      Animal fears or phobias (if yes, which animals?) \_\_\_\_\_

YES/NO                      Pets at home (if yes, which animals?) \_\_\_\_\_

YES/NO                      Negative experiences with animals: \_\_\_\_\_

By signing below you are stating your acceptance of these rules and risks and agree to accept full liability in the event that Mark harms you or your child in any way in the course of treatment or you or your child is harmed in any way as a result of being on the property of 10935 Perkins Rd Suite B, Baton Rouge, LA 70810 or at any other place while in the presence of Patti P Dowling, MS, LPC, NCC and Mark.

Client Name (please print) \_\_\_\_\_

Client signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Parent or Legal Guardian signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Patti Dowling, MS, LPC, NCC signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_