Thank you for your enquiry regarding a consultation with us. Most people have not consulted with a psychologist before they come to see us and you may be anxious about what will happen. The aim of this letter is to provide you with some information about what we do and how we work. Please feel free to discuss any of these points with us to raise any questions you have. We do not want you to worry unnecessarily about coming to see us. We will always try to explain what we are doing and we encourage you to ask question whenever you want to.

**What usually happens?**

Your first consultation usually involves describing what is troubling you. We may ask you to do some psychological test to help us get a clear picture. We should then be able to give you a written report indicating how we see your problem, what goals we want to achieve, how long this should take, and what negative side effects may occur if you follow our suggestions.
Later consultations usually involve your psychologist giving you information and suggestions and helping you to learn appropriate living and coping skills. We may ask you to practice these by role playing. Although this makes some people feel awkward at first, it does give you the chance to really try out your skills, not just talk about them. It’s important that you go away able to do something about your problems. There are many different schools of psychology. We practice evidence-based psychotherapy, often using cognitive-behavioural therapy. We choose this approach because it has solid scientific basis, so what we do is likely to you be helpful and unlikely to be harmful. Non-scientific approaches are unable to show this. You will find our approach has a strong emphasis on practical problem solving. In any one consultation, we usually start by reviewing your progress so far, we do some trouble shooting if you need it, and help you go a bit further. We won’t encourage you to just sit around and talk about your problems.

**Homework**

We will usually work out with you some homework to do before your next consultation and give you a written reminder of this. This may involve some reading, keeping a record of your problem, trying out our suggestions for tackling this problem, or recoding how that went. This homework is a very important part of your therapy program. You won’t solve much just talking with us. You will usually solve your problem by trying our suggestions in the situations where your problem occurs.

This means it is essential that you have at least tried your homework before your next consultation. If you try it but have difficulty, that’s okay. Come back and discuss the difficulty with us. If some other problem prevents you from trying your homework, come and discuss that. But if you just haven’t found the time to try it, it’s usually better to postpone your next consultation until you do find the time. Otherwise you may find that you are wasting your consultation because we cannot proceed with the next part of your program until you have tackled the present part.

**Self-help manuals?**

We may suggest you buy a self-help manual or CD. A good manual will provide you with helpful information. Step by step instructions for new living or coping skills, and clear instructions for your homework. So, it will save you time in therapy and save you from relying on your memory. It also allows you to review ideas later and to keep the gains you make in therapy.

**Confidentiality and privacy**

As part of providing a psychological service to you, we will need to collect and record personal information from you that is relevant to your current situation. This information will be a necessary part of the psychological assessment and treatment we provide to you. All information and records regarding you will be kept strictly confidential. The details of our policy for management of personal information, as required by the National Privacy Principles from the Privacy Amendment (private sector) Act 2000 are set out below. We will not normally release any information about you to anyone else, unless you give us a written and signed request to do so. There are some possible exceptions to this rule:

1. If you were referred to us by a doctor or other professional helper, we will usually send a brief report to him/her. This is a customary courtesy to the person making the referral so that he/she knows what is being done for the patient. If you want to see the report before it is sent, please tell us. If you don’t want a report sent, please tell us and we will tell the person making the referral.
2. If you are involved in a court case and we appear on your behalf or if we are subpoenaed to appear, we would not be allowed to withhold from the court any information you have given us.
3. If there is an overriding legal social obligation to do so, we may disclose information to the relevant authorities about the patient’s serious criminal acts.
4. If you indicate that you seriously intend to hurt or end your life or someone else’s, we are obliged to notify potential helper or victims.
5. If you are legally a minor (under 18) we are obliged to keep your parent(s) or guardian(s) informed of your progress, if they ask. However, we are not obliged to give those details of our discussion with you.

If your costs for consulting with us are being paid by a third party (e.g. your employer or insurer), you should have a clear agreement with them regarding their access to the personal information that you provide us. Patient files are held in a secure filing cabinet and on software which is accessible only to authorised employees. The information on each file includes personal information such as name, address, contact phone numbers, and other information which is relevant to the psychological service being provided. The information is gathered as part of the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of the patient’s condition and is seen only by the psychologist. The information is retained in offer to document what happens during sessions and enables the psychologist to provide a relevant and informed psychological service. At any stage you may request to see the information about you kept on file. The psychologist may discuss the contents with you or give you a copy. If you believe any of the information in your file is not accurate, complete or up to date, you can ask us to correct it. All requests by patients for access to information held about them should be lodged with us. These requests will be responded to within 14 days and an appointment will be made in necessary for clarification purposes. If you have a concern about the management of your personal information, please inform us (please refer to your Privacy policy for Management of Personal Information). Upon request you can obtain a copy of the National Privacy Principles, which describes your rights and how your information should be handled. Ultimately, if you wish to lodge a formal complaint about the use of, or access to, your personal information, you may do so with the Office of the Federal Privacy Commissioner on 1300 363 992, or at GPO Box 5218, Sydney NSW 1042.

**Time and punctuality**

A consultation will usually last 50 minutes. If your psychologist is late, you will still receive a full consultation or some similar arrangements will be made, fair to you. If you are late, you will usually still finish at the scheduled time, to be fair to your psychologist and patient appointments after yours. Parking is available in Corio Street. If parking is unavailable there, you could park in the Cheap as Chips & SPC Ardmona car park which is only a 1-2 minutes’ walk away. We suggest you allow enough time to arrive punctually. We will certainly try not to keep you waiting.

**Please don’t bring children (unless the appointment is for your child then your child must come to the appointment to be eligible for the Medicare rebate)**

Please do not bring your child or children to a consultation, even if it’s your child’s behaviour that is the problem, unless your psychologist asks you to bring them. For most young children’s problems, we will usually be advising the parents on how to handle the problem and won’t need to talk with the child. If it will be helpful to talk to the child, we will tell you to bring him or her to the next consultation. We know that arranging child minding can be difficult, but you would find that children are a major distraction during consultations and we are not able to provide a child-minding service at our consulting rooms, please also be mindful that children cannot be left unattended in the waiting areas.

**Broken appointments**

If you don’t keep an appointment, we will usually charge you for it, as it could have been given to someone else. If you want to change or cancel an appointment, we require two working days’ notice to give us a reasonable chance to fill that appointment time. For example, if your appointment is 2.30pm on a Monday, you need to contact us by 2.30pm on the previous Thursday if you want to change or cancel and not incur a fee. Sometimes patients cannot keep an appointment because of a sudden illness or an unexpected personal emergency. If this happens to you, please contact us as soon as possible to explain the problem and we will usually waive the fee. You can call our office anytime 0413 819 558, this has a 24-hour answering machine in which you can always leave a message. If you are asking us to waive your fee for a broken appointment because you were ill, we ask you to provide us with a medical certificate. We regret this inconvenience but sadly have found a few people abuse this offer. We hope you will see that we are trying to be fair to you and to ourselves in regard to keeping appointments.

**Payment**

We ask you to pay at the end of each consultation by cash, cheque or online. We are not a credit provider and cannot enter into arrangements that effectively involve provision of credit. This means accounts must be paid before your next appointment.

**Fees**

Fees for Clinical Psychological Services are now rebatable under Medicare, for up to 10 consultations in a calendar year. To be eligible for this rebate, you must be suffering from a recognised psychological problem and be referred by your GP, Psychiatrist or Paediatrician. The rebate is currently $126.50 for a 50-minute consultation. Discuss this with your doctor.

 If your fees are being paid by another person, organisation or government scheme, it is your responsibility to confirm that they have accepted to do this. If they do not pay, then you will be liable for the fees.

**What am I up for?**

Most people do not need a large number of consultations, depending on the nature and seriousness of your problems. We will try to give you an estimate of how many consultations we would suggest, at your first consultation. Most people space their consultations out by two or three weeks apart, to have time to try their homework. This also spreads out your costs.

I look forward to working with you to help you achieve your therapeutic life goals.

Warm Regards,

Rachael Willis