

**BLACKBIRD**  
BEHAVIORAL HEALTH



**Employee Manual**

## **ABOUT BLACKBIRD BEHAVIORAL HEALTH**

BlackBird Behavioral Health is an Oak Park Psychotherapy group practice integrating allied health professionals to promote WholeHealth and overall wellness. We believe that psychological fitness is integral to overall health and that each person has strengths that serve as building blocks for growth and healing. Our therapists pay particular attention to creating a safe and empathic space so that those in our care feel encouraged to explore their worlds. Our interventions are evidence-based and our care plans are individualized with effective techniques to tailor the therapy to each person's needs. Therapists at BlackBird work directly with primary care doctors and psychiatrists to coordinate care and improve healthcare services.

Dr. Sharon Black has been serving the Oak Park/River Forest area for 15 years and started BlackBird as a way to further assist clients, referral sources, and the community. BlackBird endeavors to grow each and every year by bringing on new associates who have unique skill sets, and whose foundations and values align with the group. As a group, BlackBird develops programs based on the skills of our therapists and the needs of the community.

## **BLACKBIRD VISION**

Develop and maintain a group of professionals who work together to provide integrative and collaborative behavioral health services for Oak Park, River Forest, and surrounding suburbs. Our primary objective is to help people feel better and function more adaptively in their worlds.

Comprehensive wellness is important to us. That's why we create a healing atmosphere that promotes wellness for the whole person by reducing risk factors, increasing psychological fitness, wholeness, and quality of life.

## **VALUES**

*Respect. Compassion. Diversity. Collaboration. Inclusion. Authenticity.*

- We respect all clients without regard to race, sex, age, disability, health status, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status or faith. While our therapists have a variety of skill sets and approaches, we all hold a deeply held value to respect our clients' experiences. This is communicated to our clients as a fundamentally affirming approach to care with genuine positive regard.
- We strive for sensitive, humane, and respectful relationships with everyone we care for and with whom we work and collaborate.
- We continually strive to assess and reassess all processes within our organization to improve our performance.
- We believe in effective leadership by promoting an organizational culture that focuses on continually improving performance for all client needs in a collaborative effort to fulfill the

mission statement of BlackBird Behavioral Health. We maintain the highest standards for professionalism in all areas of our work.

- Our therapists are valued and respected. We believe in a team-integrated service that promotes trust and safety, as well as clear and open communication. BlackBird therapists support one another.
- We strive for excellence by committing resources to ongoing education and training that will result in qualified competent care providers.
- We believe our clients are entitled to quality health care services.
- Ultimately, we take care of people. Our referral sources understand that from point of first contact, we will help clients feel supported. Our community partners rely on us to provide the highest standards of care for the patients in their care.

## **OUR SYSTEM**

The Clinical Director of BlackBird, Dr. Sharon Black, will be in communication with you regarding your schedule, caseload, and any necessary adjustments. Your occupational wellness is a priority for us as we want healthy and happy therapists on our team. It is also important to us that the working relationship between the therapist and Blackbird is mutually beneficial and that the work is meaningful, fulfilling, and rewarding.

Several tasks are the responsibility of BlackBird. These include:

- Initial phone consultation with the client.
- Verification of insurance benefits including deductibles, copays, and coinsurances.
- Brief intake to determine goodness of fit with the therapist.
- A welcome letter, including pertinent information for both the therapist and client is sent to client and therapist to facilitate first contact.
- The first appointment is typically scheduled for the therapist.
- We maintain client accounts and take care of billing and invoicing.

Once the welcome letter is sent, the therapist is responsible for reaching out to the client to confirm the first appointment and start establishing rapport. An effective template for this may be:

“Hi, Crystal!

*Tomorrow at 3:00* works great for me. I’m looking forward to meeting you. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions before then.

*Include here any other pertinent information.*

Thank you,  
*Your Name*  
*Title*

*BlackBird Behavioral Health*  
*Email*  
*phone number”*

Therapist responsibilities include emailing clients, phone contact, confirming appointments when necessary, maintaining client records and progress notes, and reporting to the clinical director. Additionally, therapists will participate in weekly team meetings. The purpose of these meetings are networking, case consultation, didactics and/or building fellowship. They will be either on site or virtual.

## **OUR APPROACH**

Therapists with BlackBird use a strength-based approach to assist clients in feeling better. We use integrative therapies to help clients with a wide variety of presenting concerns. We believe that the therapeutic relationship is the atmosphere in which all other interventions are utilized.

## **CODE OF CONDUCT**

**All therapists and associates are required to conduct themselves in accordance with the APA Code of Ethics, Illinois Mental Health Code, Illinois Confidentiality Act, and HIPAA.**

Among other things, the following may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination (this is not an all-inclusive listing and is simply meant to serve as a general guideline for decision-making):

- Violation of Blackbird's policies or safety rules
- Failing to work in a cooperative manner with leadership, co-workers, customers, and others who do business with Blackbird.
- Reckless or willful damage to Blackbird property or to the property of coworkers, customers, or any other person
- Fighting or using abusive, or threatening language or gestures
- Unauthorized or illegal possession, use or sale of alcohol or controlled substances on work premises or during working hours, while engaged in Blackbird activities
- Unauthorized possession, use, or sale of weapons, firearms, or explosives on work premises/ Theft of Blackbird property or information
- Inappropriate or violent physical contact
- Harassment, discrimination, or retaliation in violation of Blackbird's EEO policy, or Blackbird's Non-Harassment and Non-Discrimination, Workplace Violence or Bullying policies
- Performing outside work while using Blackbird property, equipment, or facilities in connection with outside work while on Blackbird time; poor attendance or poor

performance

- Falsifying employment applications, other employment records, or any other Blackbird document, including, but not limited to licensure documents, patient information or records, accounting forms, and personnel records
- Failing to maintain the confidentiality of Blackbird or patient information

Therapists may not engage in non-professional relationships with clients during treatment or for a period of two years following discharge. Non-professional behavior consists of any of the following:

- o Dating clients or members of their immediate family;
- o Physical intimacy;
- o Gambling;
- o Obtaining alcohol, drugs, or other contraband for the benefit of the client;
- o Accepting gratuities or soliciting;
- o Assuming responsibilities for client on a pass;
- o Entertaining a client in one's home;
- o Visiting a client in their home for anything other than facility business/treatment;
- o Sharing privileged information about the client.

BlackBird has affiliations with local physicians, therapists, and allied health professionals. It is vital that all BlackBird Associates' relationships and interactions with affiliates and referral sources be strictly professional. All communications with these affiliations must be well prepared and reflect professionally on the group as a whole.

It is the expectation that all BlackBird associates dress in a professional manner. Clients seek therapy because they don't feel well, are experiencing a compromise in their functioning and/or relationships, have limited support, and other sources of internal and/or external stress. When they come to see us, we want to let them know that they matter and that we care. Our appearance is the first face to face opportunity we have to communicate this care.

**It is imperative that our therapists are on time. This is a very important priority as timeliness communicates to our clients that we care.**

### **What to do when things get weird**

#### *Handling Complaints*

From time to time, patients, visitors, co-workers or others have some type of difficulty. This is to be expected. The following steps outline the general procedures that employees should use to resolve problems:

- Listen attentively to the problem.
- Apologize without blaming the other person.
- Empathize by putting yourself in the other person's shoes.
- Show your concern. Express genuine concern for the patient's complaint. When they feel you are sincere, you are in a much better position to settle the complaint.
- Express appreciation. Thank them for bringing the concerns and complaints to your attention. Recognize that, if they had not brought it to your attention, you would not have known of the problem. End with a positive comment.
- Take action. When possible, employees should find and implement an immediate solution

to the problem.

Get the facts. Write them down using the prescribed patient contact, incident, or problem-solving form. Make sure to ask the following in any complaint situation, where applicable:

- o Name
- o Address
- o Home and work phone number
- o Copies of all receipts or other pertinent information

### *Conflict Management*

If a patient, visitor, co-worker or any other person becomes difficult or confrontational, employees must continue to conduct themselves in a positive and professional manner. If an employee is unable to quickly resolve an issue or feels threatened by another person, the employee should immediately enlist the help of their supervisor or another member of the leadership team. However, if an employee feels that they are in danger, they should contact the proper authorities, and take whatever action they deem appropriate to keep themselves and others safe, immediately.

Employees should not engage in verbal and/or physical disputes or arguments with any other person. If a verbal or physical dispute should arise, disciplinary action up to and including termination may result. All complaints, including complaints of alleged discrimination or harassment should be reported immediately to your supervisor or another member of the leadership team.

## 1.0 HIPAA Expectations

All employees of BlackBird Behavioral Health are expected to understand and follow HIPAA rules within the scope of their practice. Employees are required to take a HIPAA training in order to familiarize themselves with HIPAA and Privacy and Security. Administrative staff have a two-hour training and Clinical staff have a training. All staff are required to complete a HIPAA training every two years.

Employees will adhere to HIPAA standards regarding the use and disclosure of protected health information. This includes current and former clients. In addition, employees will take the necessary precautions in order to use technology that is HIPAA compliant. Employees use an app called **PmD** for private text messaging, will use EHR in the office, and make client calls privately.

All staff must abide by HIPAA when it comes to using their personal electronics (computers, iPads, etc.) to access PHI. Staff may not use public Wi-Fi when accessing PHI (i.e., **Simple Practice**). Furthermore, staff must maintain clients' privacy when accessing their PHI (i.e., working from home around others in the home). Additionally, all staff must delete any PHI that is downloaded onto their electronics immediately (i.e., downloading a client's statement or files). Staff's personal electronics may not contain client PHI. Lastly, staff must not use auto log in features on their electronics and must log out when you leave your electronic device, as it violates HIPAA.



Any files containing clients' PHI must be discarded and not stored in desks, mailboxes or any other non-secure space. Please upload all client files into Simple Practice and discard immediately. Additionally, please do not take client files home, as it is a HIPAA violation.

### 1.1 Protecting Private & Sensitive Information

Data breaches and data loss are an unfortunate reality in today's society. The risk to Blackbird, its employees and customers from data loss and identity theft is of significant concern to Blackbird and can only be reduced through the combined efforts of every employee and contractor working for Blackbird.

Putting this policy in place enables the BlackBird Behavioral Health team to protect existing patients and employees, reducing risk from identity fraud and minimizing potential damage to Blackbird from fraudulent new accounts. Please note that this policy is supplemental to the HIPAA-related policy found in this Handbook.

The goals of this Policy are to:

- Identify risks that signify potentially fraudulent activity within new or existing covered accounts
- Detect risks when they occur in covered accounts
- Respond to risks to determine if fraudulent activity has occurred and act if fraud has been attempted or committed
- Update the program periodically, including reviewing accounts that are covered and identifying risks that are part of the program

### 1.2 Employee Privacy

As required by law, and for business necessity, Blackbird collects and stores personal information of its employees. The confidentiality and privacy of employees and their information is of the utmost importance to Blackbird. As such, all employees and contractors are required to secure and protect employees' personal, private and protected information at all times.

### 2.0 Equal Employment Opportunity

BlackBird Behavioral Health is committed to establishing and maintaining anti-racist policies and procedures, and providing equal employment opportunities to all persons regardless of their race; color; creed; religion; national origin; sex; sexual orientation; age; ancestry; marital status; arrest record; military status; order of protection status; unfavorable military discharge; citizenship status provided the individual is authorized to work in the United States; use of lawful products while not at work; being a victim of domestic or sexual violence; genetic information; physical or mental handicap or disability (if otherwise able to perform the essential functions of the job with reasonable accommodation); pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions; credit history, unless a satisfactory credit history is an established bona fide occupational requirement of a particular position; or other legally protected categories.

Employees who believe they require reasonable accommodation to perform the essential functions of their position, should request such accommodation through their direct supervisor, or contact human resources for more information.

Persons who believe they have not received equal employment opportunities should report their claims to their supervisor or human resource director, Dr. Frank Czuba. Employees also have the ability and right to file an external charge of discrimination with the Illinois Department of Human Rights. Employment, compensation, or work assignments shall not be adversely affected by complaining or providing information about not receiving equal opportunities. Retaliation is also prohibited.

More information and notices regarding your rights are attached at the end of this manual. This information and these notices can also be accessed by contacting your supervisor or human resources.

## 2.1 Non-Harassment / Non-Discrimination

Blackbird is committed to creating and maintaining a comfortable and welcoming work environment in which all individuals are treated with respect and dignity.

Blackbird and its leaders believe that every employee has the right to work in a professional atmosphere that promotes equal employment opportunities and prohibits unlawful discriminatory practices, including harassment. Therefore, Blackbird expects that all relationships among employees will be business-like and free of bias, prejudice, discrimination and harassment.

It is the policy of Blackbird to ensure equal employment opportunity without discrimination or harassment on the basis of race, color, religion, genetic information, national origin, sex, pregnancy or childbirth, medical conditions related to pregnancy and/or childbirth, age, disability, citizenship status, uniform service member status, or any other protected class under federal, state, or local law.

Blackbird strictly requires reporting of all perceived incidents of discrimination or harassment. It is the policy of Blackbird to promptly and thoroughly investigate such reports. Blackbird prohibits retaliation against any individual who reports discrimination or harassment or who participates in an investigation of such reports.

### *Definitions of Harassment*

#### Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment constitutes discrimination and is illegal under federal, state and local laws. As stated in the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission Guidelines, and for the purposes of this policy, sexual harassment is defined as unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature when, for example:

- Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or

- condition of an individual's employment;
- Submission to or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such individual; or
- Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive working environment.

Sexual harassment may include a range of subtle and not-so-subtle behaviors and may involve individuals of the same or different gender. Depending on the circumstances, these behaviors may include:

- Unwanted sexual advances or requests for sexual favors;
- Sexual jokes and innuendo; verbal abuse of a sexual nature;
- Commentary about an individual's body, sexual prowess or sexual deficiencies;
- Leering, whistling or touching;
- Insulting or obscene comments or gestures;
- Display in the workplace of sexually suggestive objects or pictures; and
- Other physical, verbal or visual conduct of a sexual nature.

#### Other Illegal Harassment

Harassment on the basis of any other protected characteristic is also strictly prohibited. Under this policy, harassment is verbal, written, or physical conduct that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual because of his/her race, color, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national origin, age, disability, marital status, citizenship, genetic information, or any other characteristic protected by law, and that:

- Has the purpose or effect of creating an intimidating, hostile or offensive work environment;
- Has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance; or
- Otherwise adversely affects an individual's employment opportunities. Types

#### of Harassment Prohibited

Harassing conduct includes: epithets, slurs, or negative stereotyping; threatening, intimidating or hostile acts; denigrating jokes; and written or graphic material that denigrates or shows hostility or aversion toward an individual or group and that is placed on walls or elsewhere on the employer's premises or circulated in the workplace, on Blackbird time or using Blackbird equipment via e-mail, phone (including voice messages), text messages or other direct messages, tweets, blogs, social networking sites, or other means.

#### Individuals and Conduct Covered

These policies apply to all applicants, company officers and employees, whether related to conduct engaged in by fellow employees or someone not directly connected to Blackbird (e.g., an outside vendor, consultant or customer).

Conduct prohibited by these policies is unacceptable in the workplace and in any work- related setting outside the workplace, such as during business trips, business meetings, and business-related social events.

#### *Bystander Responsibilities*

Blackbird is committed to creating a workplace built on mutual trust and care. As such, we have developed the following guidelines for “bystanders”. A bystander is an employee who is a witness to an incident but is not a part of it. Blackbird believes that all employees should be active bystanders and feel empowered to intervene if they witness what they believe to be harassment, discrimination or other inappropriate conduct in the workplace.

When it is safe to do so, bystanders should offer support to other employees who may be the victim of harassment, discrimination or other inappropriate conduct by:

1. Staying close to the target of the harassment or inappropriate conduct so that they are not alone with the harasser.
2. Inviting the victim to leave the area with them to get away from the harasser.
3. Taking notes when there is an opportunity to ensure that facts are recorded regarding what was witnessed.
4. Offering support to the victim.

Reporting the incident to a supervisor, human resources, or any member of the leadership team with whom they feel comfortable.

#### *Required Training for All Employees*

In compliance with Illinois state guidelines, all employees at BlackBird Behavioral Health must complete sexual harassment prevention training each calendar year, to be provided by BlackBird Behavioral Health.

Upon hire, employees must provide a certificate of completion for their most recent sexual harassment prevention training or complete retraining before the end of the calendar year.

## 2.2 Antiracism/Anti Oppression Policies

Being an organization that stands against racism and oppression is lifelong work that requires the commitment of leadership and the employees each and every day. For an organization to truly be antiracist and anti-oppressive, everyone needs to understand the goals the organization is working towards, that those goals are measurable, and that everyone knows their role in helping the organization achieve those goals. BlackBird Behavioral Health employees collectively commit to these pledges:

1. I will acknowledge and be accountable for the impact of bias and microaggression that my words and actions may have on others.
2. I'll do the work to discover and repair my own biases towards inequity and not place the burden of learning on BIPOC and other historically oppressed colleagues.
3. I will speak up to interrupt racism, bias, and microaggressions when I see them. I understand that silence = violence.
4. I will come from a place of curiosity about what my colleagues or clients say or do instead of assuming or trying to change them.
5. I will step into uncomfortable discussions and speak from an antiracist perspective. I will also be radically candid, honest, and speak from a place of care.
6. I will actively work at being antiracist. I know this journey doesn't end and I will participate regularly, in my own way, on being inclusive. I commit to learning/unlearning harmful behaviors and words and will share what I am learning with my colleagues.
7. As a BIPOC or member of other marginalized or oppressed group(s), I will speak up to the person who's done the microaggression and offer them a chance to learn and do better, if it is within my capacity.
8. I will not make assumptions about others' identities, as I may not know the identities of my peers and clients.
9. I care personally about others at [Your Practice] and can simultaneously challenge directly (or be challenged directly) words or actions that are harmful without assuming ill of another.
10. If harm has been caused to me, I will use I statements to explain the situation. If I've caused harm, I will reflect and validate what I'm hearing.
11. I will speak from my identity to help others understand where my thoughts and feelings come from.
12. I will use verbal and body language that comes from a place of respect and empathy.
13. I will center a person's experience of a situation and the impact it had on them over centering myself and my intentions in a situation. Impact > intention.
14. I will respect the lived experiences of my colleagues and clients of marginalized groups.
15. I will be radically candid when calling someone in and will give others a chance to learn and do better. And if I am called in, I will take that feedback and do the internal work.

16. I will be accountable for the impact that my words and actions have on others and be open to accepting feedback that is given to me.
17. I will acknowledge and validate when someone says I have caused them harm.
18. If I experience a microaggression, I will speak up to the person who's done the microaggression and offer them a chance to learn and do better. If I don't feel safe speaking up to the person, I will reach out to my Supervisor or HR for support.

## Work Environment

Each telecommuting employee must establish and consistently maintain an appropriate, productive work environment within their home for work purposes. Blackbird is not responsible for costs associated with the setup of the employee's home office, such as remodeling, furniture, or lighting, nor for repairs or modifications to the home office space.

## Security

Maintaining ongoing security of sensitive, private, confidential, and/or protected Blackbird information must be a top priority for telecommuters. Consistent with the organization's expectations of information security for employees working at the office, telecommuting employees will be expected to protect the proprietary company and customer information accessible from their home office or any alternative work location. Steps include the use of locked file cabinets and desks, regular password maintenance, and any other measures appropriate for the job and the environment.

The employee must determine and comply with any and all known tax or legal implications under IRS, state, and local government laws and/or restrictions of working out of a home-based office.

### 3.0 Updates to Personal Information

Keeping personal information current with Blackbird is critical for a variety of reasons, such as mailing and correspondence that is sent to employees' personal addresses, and in case of emergencies.

Employees are responsible for using the prescribed online system to update personal information in a timely manner. Personal status changes that may affect benefits enrollment must be reported as soon as possible, and always within 30-days.

Relevant changes in personal information include but are not limited to:

- Legal name changes
- Change in address (home or campus)
- Change in marital status
- Change in emergency contact

- Change in beneficiary
- Change in dependents
- Change in tax withholding
- Change in employment status

Employees must submit the prescribed form along with any associated documentation, to update their employee records.

### 3.0 New Employee Introductory Period

The first 90-days of employment are considered an introductory period for each newly- hired employee. During this period, employees will have the opportunity to become familiar with their job responsibilities and determine for themselves if they feel the job is a good fit. During the introductory period, supervisors will also have the opportunity to monitor new employees' work quality and evaluate performance.

Regular, ongoing communication regarding employee job performance, challenges, achievements, and goals is essential to a successful working relationship. Therefore, supervisors are strongly encouraged to discuss performance directly with their employees on a day-to-day basis. Employees should expect to discuss their performance, growth, and development in their role.

## **MULTICULTURAL COMPETENCE**

BlackBird associates provide services that embrace diversity and promote wellness among multicultural groups. Multicultural competence may be relevant across domains such as age, race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, socio-economic status, and/or level of functioning. We honor all persons and we are skilled in providing affirming therapy for all of the clients in our care.

BlackBird associates and employees are individuals who are qualified and capable by experience and/or education to care for clients with a mental illness.

## **TERMINATION**

Either party may terminate the relationship at any time. However, it is prudent to consider the well being of our clients and sufficient time for closure and transition should remain a priority. The length of the termination process (for example, one month) may be mutually decided on by Dr. Sharon Black and the therapist.

## Employee Handbook Acknowledgment and Receipt

I have received my copy of the Employee Handbook, and/or have been notified as to how I can access my copy of the Employee Handbook electronically.

The Employee Handbook provides important information about BlackBird Behavioral Health, (“Company”) and I understand that I should consult my supervisor or a member of leadership regarding any questions that I may have that are not answered in the handbook. I have entered my employment relationship with the Company voluntarily and acknowledge that there is no specified length of employment. Accordingly, either the Company or I can terminate the relationship at will, with or without cause, at any time, so long as there is not violation of applicable federal or state law.

I understand and agree that, other than the Dr. Sharon Black of BlackBird Behavioral Health, no manager, supervisor or representative of the Company has any authority to enter into any agreement for employment other than at will; only the Practice Leader of the Company has the authority to make any such agreement and then only in writing, signed by an owner of the Company.

This handbook and the policies and procedures contained herein supersede any and all prior practices, oral or written representations, or statements regarding the terms and conditions of my employment with the Company. By distributing this handbook, the Company expressly revokes any and all previous policies and procedures that are inconsistent with those contained herein.

I understand that, except for employment-at-will status, the Company may change any and all policies and practices at any time. Additionally, the Company reserves the right to change my hours, wages and working conditions at any time. All such changes will be communicated through official notices, and I understand that revised information may supersede, modify or eliminate existing policies. Only the Dr. Sharon Black of the company has the ability to adopt any revisions to the policies in this handbook.

I understand that it is my responsibility to read and comply with the policies contained in this handbook and any revisions made to it. I understand that I am to contact my supervisor or another member of the leadership team with questions regarding information contained in the company handbook.

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Employee’s Signature



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Employee's Name (Printed)

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Date

SIGNED PAGE TO BE RETAINED IN EMPLOYEE'S PERSONNEL FILE