

The Learning Company Communications and Ethics

Ethical Issues Encountered

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Client / Therapist Relationship

ROLE OF MESSAGE THERAPIST TO CLIENT

In a therapeutic relationship we are specifically serving the health care interests of vulnerable persons. The therapeutic relationship's primary function is to facilitate the health and well being of clients, ensuring that we bring our full presence and commitment to the experience.

The following is a list of questions that can assist a therapist in bringing clarity and presence to the relationship.

Why am I here?

What can I bring to the therapeutic experience?

Am I here for the client or for me?

Do I need the client to confirm or validate me?

Do I need the client to like me in order to feel better about myself?

Do I need to prove to the client that I am effective?

Do I need the client to admire me?

Do I need the client to need me?

Do I feel inadequate when I think I am not making progress or enough progress with a client?

BOUNDARIES

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- Necessary limits of personal space for comfort
- The area you occupy that you feel is appropriately under your control
- Sometimes your boundary is a few cm. or sometimes more than meter.

Boundary Violations:

- When professionals exploit relationships to meet personal needs rather than the clients needs
- Client is not able to protect his/her own rights
- Clients are perceived as vulnerable persons
- Can develop a parent/child relationship unconsciously
- Boundaries are violated when one person crosses a line by doing something to another person without the other person's consent.

Characteristics of Healthy Boundaries

Awareness and Clarity

- Become self aware and overcoming prejudices
- Think clearly at all times
- Refrain from any mood altering substances

Appropriateness

- Must be appropriate for the setting

Congruency

- Must be congruent with the individual's values, goals and priorities
- Those that are not congruent with the client will be difficult to maintain

Protective

- Must protect the individual's sense of well being and integrity
- Must enhance and protect self worth

Flexibility and Adaptability

- Individual should periodically evaluate the appropriateness of the boundaries and be willing to create more rigid or flexible ones

What can Professionals do to ensure they don't abuse their power?

- It is good to establish and maintain trust through their willingness to engage fully and respectfully with their client.
- They can take charge of accepting their authority and setting the tone and direction that keep the work focused and task oriented.
- Create and maintain a safe work environment by establishing clear boundaries. It is also good for yourself to define behaviors that are necessary to fulfill their expectations by keeping themselves mindful of their own power to effect their own decisions.
- Should place the client's interest and well-being first.

Crossing Boundaries: Common Mistakes

- Do not represent yourself as being qualified in a specific modality without proper training and experience
- Playing psychotherapist, especially when a client experiences an emotional release during a session, is another common error
- Asking a client to be a friend (dual relationship)
- Making comments about a client appearance
- Working on a client that has clear contraindication to treatment

Two main types of **Boundary Violations**

1. Gross Violation
e.g. engage in sexual activity with clients
2. Dual Relationships

A **dual relationship** involves the blending and merging of a professional relationship with a client with another potentially incompatible role.

Some forms of dual relationships include:

1. Combining the roles of therapist and teacher
2. Bartering therapy for goods and services
3. Providing therapy to a relative or a friend's relative
4. Socializing outside therapy sessions
5. Becoming emotionally or sexually involved with a client or a former client

Dual Relationship Scale

High Risk

Serious harm relationship) prohibited behavior (e.g. sexual relationship)

Moderate Risk

Moderate harm highly discouraged behavior (e.g. friends with client, treating relatives, etc.)

Unlikely Risk

Unforeseeable harm individual discretion (e.g. any type of behavior which doesn't fall into the above categories, but which could merge roles)

Checklist

1. Does this situation pose a dual relationship?
2. What roles would I be merging?
3. What laws, policies, beliefs, or values need to be considered?
4. Where would I rate the potential for harm using the dual relationship scale?
5. What are the risks to the client? What are the benefits to the client?
6. What are the risks for me, the therapist?
7. What are the benefits for me the therapist?

Why are dual relationships ethically wrong?

- When the two roles come together to form another kind of relationship it reflects a lack of awareness or concern about the impact of our behavior on our clients.
- Our primary goal is to serve and benefit the well being of our clients.
- When we place our needs and/or desire above the well being of our clients, we are behaving unethically.

Most Common Dual Relationship

FRIENDSHIP

- In friendship the relationship is 50/50
- In a therapeutic relationship this is not the case, the therapist knows much more about the client than the client knows about the therapist
- The therapeutic relationship exists to benefit the client
- Turning clients into friends may also interfere with our relationship with other clients
- Maintaining professional boundaries is difficult with someone with whom we have a close relationship
- When a friend then becomes a client, professional boundaries must be established
- Each party needs to understand their position and responsibility
- Conversation must be kept in focus on the client
- Friends are still required to pay the associated fee with the treatment and should not expect a "deal"
- Friends who are being used as "guinea pigs" for a massage student should be aware that after graduation they are required to follow the fee schedule of other clients

Dating Clients

- If a therapeutic relationship is moving into a potentially romantic relationship the therapeutic relationship must be terminated immediately
- Code of ethics requires a 1 year period to pass between the time the therapist has terminated the relationship and begins to start a more personal relationship
- The decision to pursue personal relationship with ex-clients should be considered carefully

- Such situations can easily damage the therapists relationship with other clients and, damage reputations
- The best decision is to not date ex-clients

Why is it ethically wrong to become sexually involved with a client?

- It is a betrayal to trust of the contract and an abuse of power given to professionals to act in the client's best interests.
- Erotic contact fosters dependence.
- Clients can come to think of their therapist as an ideal person instead of forming meaningful relationships with others.
- Objectivity is lost.
- Professionals become more concerned about the feelings the clients have towards them instead of doing their job.
- The client can often feel taken advantage of and may devalue contributions of other health care providers.

Sexual Misconduct

- Defined as any sexual contact between therapist and client or any sexualizing of the therapeutic relationship
- The action may be as innocent as making a comment that got misinterpreted to something as obvious as a male client requesting sexual services
- Given that the profession uses touch as our primary therapeutic tool we need to be prepared for the possibility that our touch will be misread
- The therapist must be aware of the possible impact that their touch can have and be willing to take responsibility for how touch affects their clients
- Examples of sexual misconduct:
 - Engaging in verbal or physical flirtatious behaviour
 - Gestures or expressions that are seductive in any nature
 - Looking at a client seductively
 - Sexual comments about a clients body or clothing
 - Telling sexual jokes
 - Failure to ensure privacy when draping
 - Entering the room before the client is completely draped or dressed
 - Conversations about sexual problems, sexual performance, preferences, or fantasies
 - Asking client on a date
 - Unnecessary examination or treatment
 - Inappropriate touching of breast or pelvic area
 - Therapists breasts or pelvic area touching a client
 - Intercourse
 - Rape
- Here are some ways to avoid those situations:
 - Avoid terms of endearment
 - Use anatomical references and clinical terminology
 - In advertising avoid words such as release, available any time, my place or yours, total relaxation and full body massage (these can all be misinterpreted)
 - When booking a new client in for an appointment as for his/her goals of treatment
 - Do not work in a secluded office with clients you do not know

- o Do not schedule new clients late in the day
- o Realize problems associated with a home office
- o Out calls deserve special consideration
- o Avoid wearing clothing that might give the wrong impression
- o Obtain separate consent when working on the gluteal or breast tissue
- o Beware to body contact during the massage