Preparing for Client Breaks
Good Practice in Counselling & Psychotherapy

Significance for the client

- Could bring up old attachments
- Feelings of loss or abandonment
- Could be a significant anniversary for loss or bereavement
- They cannot have a holiday or build a fantasy around where you may go
- Holidays hold significant fears

Significance for the Counsellor

- Allows time for self-care
- Time to rebuild and reflect
- Symbolises for the client the notion that counselling will not last forever and there will be an end at some point
- Sets an appropriate boundary

Did you know that this resource is available in the Counselling Study Resource with links to related topics for further reading? Read it online.

Significant occasions

- Religious holidays
- Summer holidays
- Key dates (bank holidays, anniversary of a bereavement)
- Returning to work (maybe after a period of illness)

Signs of dependency

- Anxiety as the client nears the break
- 'I don't know if I can cope' statements
- 'Will you think of me' statements from the client
- Escalation in presentation - suicidal or self-harm statements from the client
- New 'explosive' material - 'I am leaving my partner today!'
- Relapse

Mapping support

- Reflect any support that clients may have in place (i.e., support they have told you about such as family, friends or other agencies they may be working with)
- Agency support (your agency may have a drop-in centre or a contact person)
- Information on other support (Samaritans, faith/religion, self-efficacy)

Good Practice

- Always plan any breaks in advance. If possible, contract for them.
- Allow at least 1 week's notice for every month you have been working with the client.
- Look out for signs of dependency. Work with them if they arise.
- Do not be tempted to give out your phone number.

Finally…

- Be thoughtful and kind. The core conditions are powerful and for some clients all-encompassing.
- Always acknowledge client anxiety. Don't deny or discount their feelings.