



# BOUNDARIES IN COUNSELLING

In July 2018, the BACP revised its ethical framework for counselling and psychotherapy.

The ethical framework refers to 'core principles':

“Principles direct attention to important ethical responsibilities. Our core principles are:

## **Principles**

**Being trustworthy:** honouring the trust placed in the practitioner.

**Autonomy:** respect for the client's right to be self-governing.

**Beneficence:** a commitment to promoting the client's wellbeing.

**Non-maleficence:** a commitment to avoiding harm to the client.

**Justice:** the fair and impartial treatment of all clients and the provision of adequate services.

**Self-respect:** fostering the practitioner's self-knowledge, integrity and care for self.

*-BACP Ethical Framework 2018 (p 8-9)*

The framework is helpful to the extent that some boundary issues are made clear.

Generally speaking, the counsellor has to use their own ‘moral compass’ and insights gained from supervision to walk an ethical path.

So, what kind of issues do counsellors have to negotiate in terms of boundaries?

- One of the most common boundary issues is **‘rescuing’**. Examples of this can be a therapist telling a client ‘everything will be alright’, actively getting involved with the client's issues by, say, speaking with the client's partner or work – trying to make things better.
- Another area that sometimes gets overlooked is **time management**, letting sessions overrun or rescheduling sessions to a time that is inconvenient for the therapist. If a therapist does this, it may be that a little introspection is needed to examine their motivations.
- Sometimes **transference**, the process of seeing in your client traits of another person or a relationship from your past, can have a huge impact on boundaries. Seeing the client through the filter of another relationship can be confusing and bring up feelings maybe from childhood. It is at this point when we may shift from being an ‘adult’ in the room to a child state or a parental state, making boundaries more likely to be crossed.

One area of boundary management is **managing client's expectations**. These include being clear on the following things:

- Appointment times and duration of therapy
- How contact is managed outside of therapy
- By what medium you are available to be contacted (phone, email, website, etc.)

Even with the clearest of contracts, clients can sometimes overstep boundaries. This could include:

- Seeing the relationship other than a client-counsellor interaction
- Unsolicited contacting between sessions
- Contacting you on social media (asking to be added as a friend)

In cases like these, a high degree of sensitivity needs to be employed, along with a clear discussion about is going on for the client when boundaries are crossed.

In cases where the client repeatedly crosses boundaries, access to supportive supervision is essential, and a referral or discontinuation of services may be the only outcome.

## Resources

Bacp.co.uk. (2019). *BACP Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*. [online] Available at: <https://www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/ethical-framework-for-the-counselling-professions/> [Accessed 16 Oct. 2019].