



MAKING AN ETHICAL REFERRAL

Part of being a competent counsellor is knowing when you are working beyond your limits of training, or when the client presents with an issue which needs another form of support.

The 2018 BACP Ethical Framework under the heading '*Our commitment to clients*' reminds us that we will '*provide an appropriate standard of service to our clients*' and '*work within our competence*.'

Sometimes clients initially present with one issue, but through the arch of therapy, it becomes apparent they may need a different form of support from counselling.

An example of this is a client who initially presents with depression; however, it soon becomes clear that the real issue is over the use and dependence on alcohol, which is a known contributor to depression.

In cases like this, the counsellor must be both sensitive in addressing the issue and have a solution to offer the client.

If, after broaching the subject, the client feels like a referral is the best option, then the referral process can be put in place.

Consideration of how the client may react to the offer of referral is an essential consideration. Remember that at no point should the client believe that their issue is so vast that even the counsellor cannot deal with it!

Using supervision can be immensely helpful in exploring at what point a referral may be necessary and in preparing the ground before speaking with the client.

Referral processes can differ from organisation to organisation, so a counsellor must have an excellent working knowledge of what agencies are available and their referral policies and procedures.

It is also essential that counsellors have a good understanding of the **Caldicott Principles** of information sharing, a protocol developed by Dame Fiona Caldicott in 1997.

The principles for information sharing came about after a data breach in the late 1990s which saw hundreds of clients' records dumped on landfill sites.

With any referral comes an ending. Care and consideration need to be at the forefront of counsellors' thinking, offering the client options such as a phased or immediate ending and recognising where the client is now, exploring the positives and possible negatives.

When ending, exploring how the client feels about the process is both good practice and ethically sound.

Sometimes, in the process of managing a referral, **the impact on the counsellor needs to be considered.** Supportive supervision is essential if feelings of being deskilled or being incompetent come up for the counsellor, particularly if the ending is sudden or abrupt.

References

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