



BOUNDARY VIOLATIONS IN THERAPEUTIC RELATIONSHIPS

What clients need to know

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In Therapy Abuse and Exploitation (TAE), the abusive therapist misuses their power and authority to groom their client to accept exploitation. They then misuse it again when the therapeutic relationship is ending to either silence their victim or ensure any disclosures are discredited.

1 Why is important to know about TAE?

The damage done to clients when an abusive therapist transgresses boundaries to groom and then exploit them can be catastrophic. Their defensive actions in the Termination Phase add a whole new layer of betrayal and trauma. Clients who are informed about TAE and appropriate boundaries in therapy have a greater chance of avoiding abusive therapists.

3 Resources

TELL, Therapy Exploitation Link Line (therapyabuse.org)
Coming to Voice, (comingtovoice.ca)
ReThreading Madness Podcasts (rethreadingmadness.ca)

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2 Has this happened to you?

If you have experienced TAE, there are places to find support. If you cannot rely on friends or family for this, there are other places where you can reach out to including Facebook forums, subreddits, and organizations like TELL (The Therapy Exploitation Link Line) or google #therapyabuse to find resources.

4 Remember...

The responsibility for maintaining appropriate boundaries in therapy ALWAYS belongs with the mental health professional. It never happens because of something the client did, said, needed, or wanted. Therapists hold enormous power and authority over their clients. A good therapist will ensure transgressions don't happen. A bad therapist will misuse their power and authority to exploit a client's transference or needs.

There are three phases to TAE:

Grooming: The point of grooming is to enable the exploitation of their victim. It can include calling the victim special, giving gifts, creating a sense of financial indebtedness, touching, and/or encouraging their victim to feel responsibility for the perpetrator's well-being

Exploitation: The exploitation takes several forms including financial, physical, emotional, and sexual.

Termination: When the therapeutic relationship terminates abusive therapists who fear exposure of their transgressions, will misuse their power and authority to ensure their victim is silenced and/or discredited.

For more information

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**Resources, information,
workshops, support groups**

Red Flags for Therapy Abuse and Exploitation

Sessions

- last appointment of their day.*
- encourages calls/texts unlimited by day or time
- informal sessions i.e., dinners or coffee.
- frequently checks up on client.
- encourages clients to use substances and/or alcohol during sessions

Money as Control

- pro bono sessions used as leverage.*
- barter with clients to exchange sessions for services.
- gives and accepts/encourages gifts and monetary favors from clients.

Isolating Client

- encourages estrangement from partner, family members, and/or friends.*
- requires secrecy around the therapeutic process or transgressions.
- breaks confidentiality by discussing other clients

Sharing of Personal Information

- over shares information about personal life.*
- monopolizes entire sessions with their own issues.

Creating Dependency

- makes promises to always be available, to never hurt, or abandon.
- daily contact in-person or via social media or phone.
- relaxes boundaries.
- calls client special or their favorite and compliments client about appearance, clothes, body, work, intelligence.*
- cycles between being disapproving, angry, cold, distant, or punitive and loving and warm.

Positions Themselves as the Expert

- demands trust from client.
- positions themselves as only one who can understand or help.
- discourages discussions with other professionals, family, or friends.

Social (Dual Relationships)

- creates a dual relationship with current or former client that resembles friendships, colleagues working together, and/or sexual contact

Suicide

- suggests suicide as solution to problems.

Sexual Misconduct & Assault

- states or acts in a manner that clearly demonstrates a sexual attraction to the client:
- sexualizes the therapeutic process: including touch, comments, sexual contact and focusing sexual content into therapeutic work that is inconsistent to work being done.

Termination Phase

- when relationship ends and/or the client begins to disclose transgressions, the abusive therapist will misuse their power and authority, to control, silence and/or discredit their victim in a way that resembles that of other offenders. This will include everything from abandoning clients, adding invalidating information to the client's file, re-diagnosis with a discrediting disorder (ie. Borderline), promises to reform, threatens to disclose secrets revealed in therapy, triggers disabling fears and concerns, and if relationship became committed (ie partnerships or marriages) they will use forms of control similar to spousal batterers.

(This is a shortened list. A full list can be found at comingtovoice.ca "Ethical Boundaries in Therapy: a Checklist")

* It is important to remember that all therapists have a last session of the day, many good practitioners maintain a portion of their practice as pro bono, a good therapist should provide feedback about negative relationships in their client's life, they may judiciously share some details of their personal life, and a good therapist will offer positive feedback and inquire into a client's sex life IF these are pertinent to that client's healing process. Having one of two of these red flags in your therapy is not necessarily proof of an abusive therapist. It is important to view these in context.

If you have questions regarding this list, please do not hesitate to contact Bernadine Fox (workshops.therapy.abuse@gmail.com) using subject line "Questions regarding Checklist".