

University of Manchester Counselling Service Code of Ethics and Practice

1. Introduction

The following code informs the professional conduct of counsellors working in the University of Manchester Counselling Service. It is also a reference, along with the Counselling Service's Good Practice Guidelines, to the standards of conduct staff and students using the service can expect.

1.1. Purpose of Counselling

Counselling aims to relieve psychological difficulties and promote well being through enabling clients to develop a shared understanding of the patterns of thought, feeling and activity by which their difficulties are maintained and well being is prevented. It is a collaborative and personally involving activity for both counsellor and client and the counsellor needs to make skilled, creative and professional use of boundaries of relationship, role, task and time. The therapeutic relationship established between counsellor and client is fundamental to effective help.

1.2. Guiding principle

The guiding principle of the code is that the counsellor's central professional concern is the client's welfare and well-being. The code aims to provide a framework for addressing the complex issues arising from the counselling relationship. It aims to protect the client from harm and also to provide standards of what constitutes harm. The code also aims to offer protection to the counsellor from unjust allegations of harm.

1.3. Additional obligations

Counsellors have obligations not only to his or her clients but also to their profession. This code addresses the relationship between the counsellor and colleagues, their profession and the other helping professions. The Code gives consideration to issues to do with publicity, research and publication.

1.4. Structure, Purpose and Limits of the Code

The Code embodies the experience of the professions of psychological therapy and counselling in establishing areas where harm to the client is possible or where conflicts between principles make assessment of the most advantageous course of action complex. The code cannot be comprehensive and address all situations but is intended as guidance to help counsellors to balance out competing demands. It should not be interpreted as a restrictive rule book but rather as a method for establishing a safe and effective place for creative counselling and psychotherapy to take place.

1.5. Breaches of the Code

Counsellors have an obligation to be acquainted with and to act in accordance with these principles. Where a breach of this Code is perceived, the Counselling Service has a Complaints Procedure to guide investigating such a breach and take appropriate action should it be found that a breach has occurred.

1.6. Who the Code applies to

The code applies to any member of staff working in the Counselling Service whether full time, honorary, sessional or trainee.

1.7. The well-being of the client

The first principle of this Code is that the well-being of the client is the central concern of the counsellor. The counsellor should not exploit their client sexually, financially or emotionally or cause physical harm.

2. Boundaries

2.1 It is essential to be aware of the boundaries of counselling and to limit relationships with clients to the therapeutic setting.

2.2 Social contact with clients should normally be avoided.

2.3 The counsellor should not take on as clients members of his or her own family, friends or immediate colleagues.

2.4 The counsellor should never enter into a sexual relationship with his or her current or past clients.

2.5 Counsellors should ensure as far as is possible that the client is aware of the contractual boundaries of the relationship. This includes, day and times of meetings, arrangements for holidays, aims and type of working methods including the ending of counselling help. The right of the client and of the counsellor to terminate, subject to contractual arrangements, should be acknowledged.

3. Confidentiality

3.1. The counsellor-client relationship is one in which the client should feel safe that both the fact of the meeting and the content of that meeting is private and confidential to the Counselling Service.

3.2. In general, and subject to the requirements of law, the counsellor must take care to prevent the identity of individuals being revealed deliberately or inadvertently, without

their expressed permission. The client should be informed at the outset of counselling of the limits of and exceptions to confidentiality.

3.3. Counsellors should take all reasonable steps to ensure that colleagues, staff and trainees with whom they work understand and respect the need for confidentiality regarding any information obtained.

3.4. In exceptional circumstances, where there is sufficient evidence to raise serious concern about the safety or interests of clients, or about others who may be threatened by the client's behaviour, the counsellor may take such steps as are judged necessary to inform appropriate third parties without prior consent - although wherever possible prior consent should be sought - after first consulting an experienced and disinterested colleague, unless the delay caused by seeking this advice would involve a significant risk to life or health the client should be informed of this action.

3.5. This confidentiality is further limited by the requirements stated elsewhere in this Code for the need for the counsellor to have supervision and to liaise appropriately with other helping professionals. Discussion of the client in these contexts is subject to the same rules of confidentiality.

3.6. The counsellor is required to safeguard the welfare and anonymity of clients when any form of publication of clinical material is being considered and to obtain their consent. Any written or verbal presentation of clinical material must preserve the anonymity of the client.

4. Supervision

4.1. The counsellor should arrange for supervision or consultation on their work as appropriate.

4.2. The purpose of supervision - amongst others - is to ensure the efficacy of the work with the client and that the high standards are maintained.

4.3. Knowledge gained in the course of giving supervision or professional support is subject to the same rules of confidentiality

5. Limitations on effectiveness

5.1. The counsellor should be aware of the limitations on his or her ability to offer an effective service. This includes:

5.2. the scope of counselling as a method of relieving distress - where there are clear grounds that other interventions would be of benefit to the client the counsellor should normally discuss this with the client;

5.3. the extent of her professional competence - a counsellor should be involved in regular practice and should ensure that he or she maintains awareness of developments in the field and has periodic refresher training in line with the principles of continuing professional development.

5.4. The counsellor must not make false claims as to their competence or training.

5.5. the level of his or her personal functioning - the counsellor must actively monitor their own personal functioning and, if in doubt, seek help in assessing where the balance between the demands/needs of the client for a service conflict with his or her day to day capacity to deliver that service.

6. Appropriate environment

6.1. Counsellors have a responsibility to ensure that they are working within an appropriate environment.

6.2. Clients should be seen in appropriate surroundings providing privacy, security and comfort.

6.3. Counsellors must satisfy themselves that they are covered by indemnity arrangements against claims for damages from alleged negligence or accidental injury.

7. Professional relationships

7.1. Counsellors act within a network of services and need to act with respect for these services.

7.2. Counsellors should discuss with clients what contact the clients have had with other helping professions. Counsellors need to consider where the service they offer may conflict with the help offered by other professionals. Permission should be sought to contact other professionals where appropriate and the counsellor should then proceed to make such contact.

8. Research

8.1. Counsellors are required to clarify with clients the nature, purpose and conditions of any research in which the clients are to be involved and to ensure that informed and verifiable consent is given before commencement.

9. Publicity

9.1. In making services publicly known, the counsellor should not make unwarranted claims.