

Frequently asked questions

Here are some of the questions we're often asked by clients. You may be able to find the answer to your concerns here.

My therapist has done something that I'm not sure is right. I think they have crossed a boundary. But I'm not sure. What should I do now?

If you do not feel comfortable with something that has happened, then it is important you try to speak with your therapist about what is worrying you. If you tell them how you feel, then it can often help therapy get better. Your therapist should encourage you to do this. They should give you the time to let them know about what parts of the therapy have been helpful to you and what parts have not helped you. This should help you with any worries that you have. They should be dealt with when they come up.

My therapist stopped seeing me without any warning. Is that ok?

Ending therapy suddenly would not usually be considered ok. Whether you're going to be in therapy for a short time or a long time, the ending should not come as a surprise to you. If possible, it should be planned and agreed with you. Your therapist should know that endings can be hard for a client, so they should start talking about the end of therapy with you a few sessions before it's due. They may even talk about it at the very start. For example, if you are in therapy for a short time, this might be at the beginning. Therapy would then have a planned beginning, middle and an end. This ought to be made clear to you in the first session.

Talking about the end of therapy early on means you have time to get used to the idea and that any concerns you have or new problems that come up can be talked about in the last sessions.

I want to end therapy, but my therapist wants us to carry on. What should I do?

If possible, the decision to end therapy would be made together with your therapist. But in the end, it is your decision and you should not feel you have to stay in therapy if you do not want to. It is your right to decide when to stop. It is your right to look for another therapist at any time.

My therapist wants me to pay if I miss or cancel a session. But I have let them know I can't go. Is this right? Can they still charge me?

Your therapist should let you know how much time they need you to give them if you are going to miss or cancel a session. Fees should be talked about before the start of therapy. This should include missed or cancelled sessions, as well as holidays. This means you know what to expect and that you agree with what your therapist has told you before therapy starts. This should be written in your contract. You can then make an informed decision about whether you want to work with that therapist or not. Therapy should not begin until you have agreed the contract.

Contracting

Making a contract is important to ensure you and your therapist work well together.

What should be in a contract?

You have the right to know what to expect from your counsellor. This might include:

- what time a session starts
- how long a session will last for
- where a session will take place
- how much a session will cost
- how you need to pay for the session
- the number of sessions you may need to have
- what is their cancellation policy
- what is their record-keeping policy

The therapist should also talk to you about:

- the way they work
- the counselling process
- your goals. By talking about your goals with your therapist then they can then decide if they feel they can give you the therapy you need
- are there limits to confidentiality? What are they?
- If there can be contact between your sessions and when this might be

I want to be friends with my therapist. Is this ok? Can we do this?

Your therapist is the professional and they should try to avoid harm to their clients.

It is thought that it is difficult to change the imbalance of power between a client and their therapist. And that there should be boundaries after therapy ends as well as during it. If a therapist wants to be friends with their client, or if they want an even closer relationship with them, then often something will go wrong with this. The therapist might then be blamed for not stopping any harm to their client.

They should also be helping their clients not to be too dependent on them.

I would like to contact my therapist outside of our sessions? Can I do this? Is it okay to do?

Contact between sessions is usually only for planning your sessions. But some therapists might let their clients contact them, so they can give their clients some extra support. You should talk about this in your session and agree any contact. This should then be added to your contract.

Notes and record keeping

Will my therapist make and keep notes of our sessions?

This can vary. There is no law that says a therapist has to take notes, but it is usually expected that they will do so. Most therapists do this. Some may write quite a lot of detail and others may just write short notes to remind them what you spoke to them about.

Your therapist should tell you about the notes they write. They should tell you what they do with them. They should also do this at the start of therapy. They should make sure you understand what they are doing and that you agree with this. They should let you know what happens to the notes and who else might need to see them.

If a therapist works for someone else then they need to follow the organisation's policy about making notes and how long they need to be kept for. If they work for themselves then they can decide what to do. But they need to follow data protection law and remember their membership body's ethical codes.

How can I get a copy of my notes? Is this easy to do?

You can ask your therapist for a copy of your notes. If they do not help you with this, you can then contact the Information Commissioner's Office (the ICO) and talk to them about how to get a copy of your notes. This is done through what is called a data subject access request. The ICO can give you advice and guidance about your notes.

You can call the ICO on 0303 123 1113 or 0125 545745 from between 9am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. You can talk about your rights with them.

Who can see my notes?

If your therapist works for an organisation, then your therapist's line manager could see your notes. But you should be told of this from the start

- **Couples counselling**

Both clients are part of the contract. If one client wants to see a copy of the notes then they can only ask for the parts about themselves. If they want to see all the notes then the second client has to agree to this. If one client does not agree then all the information about them must be removed from the notes.

- **Children**

The law says that a child who is competent to make their own decisions has the right to see a copy of their own notes. If a child is not, then those who have parental responsibility have the right to decide about the child's therapy. They might be able to see the child's notes. But a therapist or school may be allowed to withhold them so they can protect the child, or others. It might also be to protect a police investigation, or another investigation.

- **Police**

The police might ask a therapist for a copy of a client's notes. These might be linked to an investigation. But the police do not have the right to have a copy of any notes without the permission from a judge.

Is talking to my therapist kept private?

Your therapist should talk to you about confidentiality at the start of therapy. They should tell you when they may need to break it. But they can talk to you at any time if you want this to be made more clear to you. There are only a few times when a therapist might need to pass on information about you to someone else. But this should only be to another professional and for a genuine reason.

This might be:

- when the law needs them to
- when you or someone else may be at risk of being harmed
- when therapists talk to their supervisors about their work with you
- when they are passing you to another professional for help
- when they are sharing information about your health with a health professional involved in your care

If your therapist is worried about you then it is important that they talk to you first. But they may not do this if the law says they can't do so.

Your relationship with your therapist

I sometimes feel that my therapist is judging me and how I live my life and my family and my friends. Is that OK? Should they do that?

Therapists should not judge you when you tell them about yourself, or what you think or how you behave. And they should not tell you what to do. They should try to be fair and unbiased. They should be kind towards you and help you to talk about how you are feeling and about your emotions. They should be fair, open and trustworthy to let a respectful, working relationship grow between you.

What do boundaries mean?

This means that a therapist keeps good, clear standards. Talking to your therapist is different from talking with a friend. You have a formal relationship with them. Boundaries help with this. At the start of therapy your therapist should let you know what the boundaries are. When they are kept then they can protect you from poor practice. It is a down to the therapist to set and to keep them. Your therapist should protect you from emotional harm.

My therapist hugged me at the end of our session? Is this ok? And is it ok for me to hug them?

Hugging can happen, but it should not happen without careful thought because it could change your relationship with them. It may change your expectations of them. It would be best for your therapist to talk it through with their supervisor first.

I would like to make a complaint about the unethical practice of my therapist. How do I do this?

Please see [How to complain about a BACP member](#) for details.