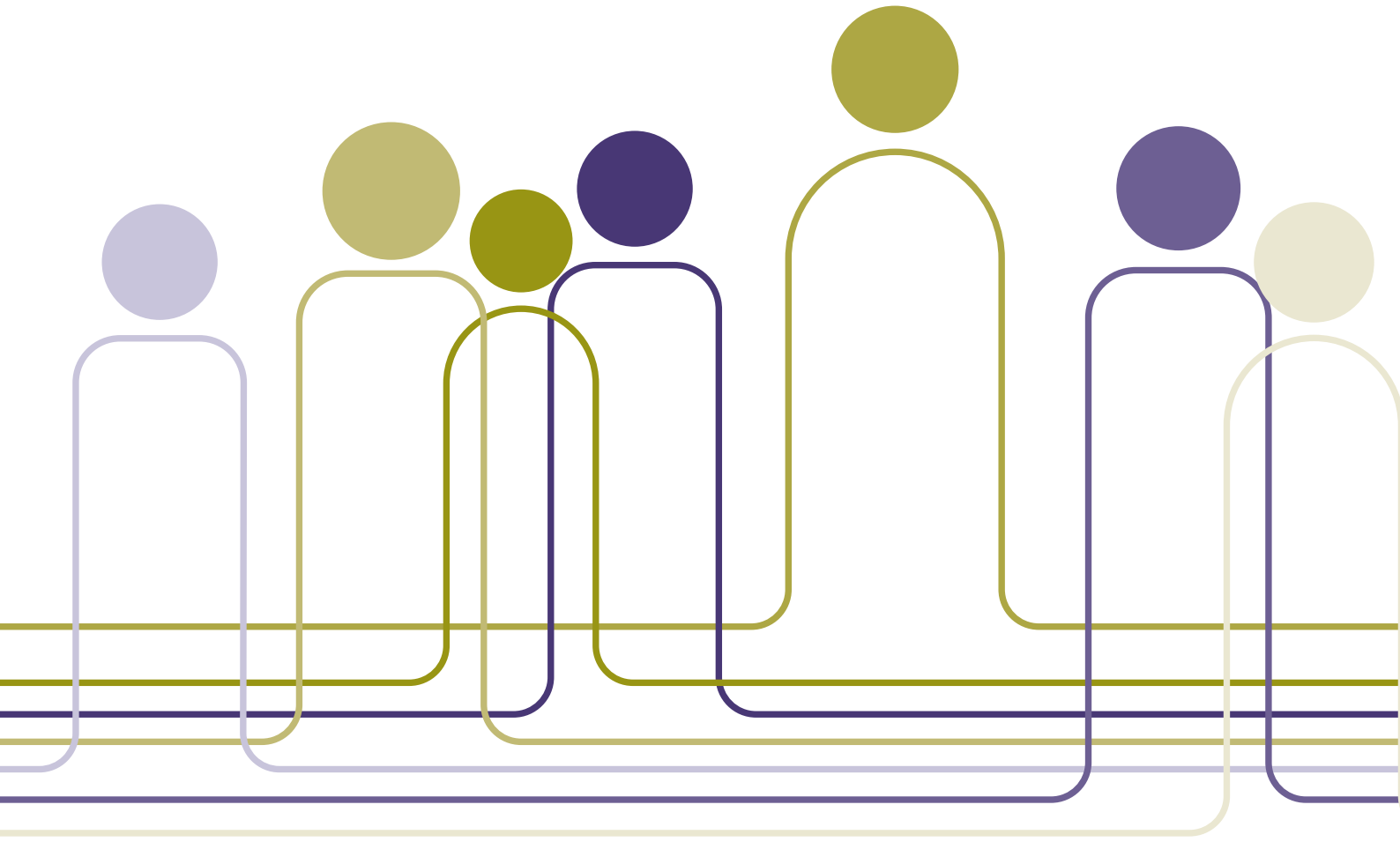
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016

Counselling placements: a resource for placement providers and trainees



Fact sheet

Ethics in Practice

Ethics in Practice 016
Fact Sheet

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Context

This resource is one of a suite prepared by BACP to enable members to engage with the BACP *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* (2026)

Using Fact Sheet resources

The membership agreement with BACP establishes a contractual commitment by members to abide by the *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* (2026), which includes a responsibility for members to keep the skills and knowledge relevant to their work up to date.

The BACP Ethics in Practice resources are solely intended to support good practice by offering general information on specific topics based on legal principles and policy applicable at the time of writing. They are intended for information purposes only and are not a substitute for professional advice. BACP and the author accept no responsibility for and accept no liability as a result of any person acting or refraining from acting on the basis of the resources.

Practice issues and dilemmas are often complex, and may vary depending on clients, particular models of working, the context of the work and the therapeutic interventions provided. We therefore strongly recommend consulting your supervisor, and also, wherever necessary, a suitably qualified practitioner or lawyer. Some professional insurers will provide legal advice as part of their service.

BACP and the author make no representation or warranty as to the completeness or accuracy of the information contained in the resources. References in this resource were up to date at the time of writing but there may be changes in particular to the law, government departments, government policies and guidance, websites and web addresses. Organisations and agencies may also change their practice or policies, so please be alert for any changes that may affect your therapy practice.

In this resource, the word 'practitioner' is used to mean specifically counsellors and psychotherapists and 'therapy' to mean specifically counselling and psychotherapy.

'Trainer' means any organisation providing counselling and psychotherapy training and the terms 'placement provider' and 'agency' refer to an organisation providing placements for trainees in counselling and psychotherapy.

Introduction

This resource gives an overview of the elements that go into making a good placement experience. It is intended for both trainees and placement providers and covers the main areas involved in setting up a trainee's placement. It illustrates the specific responsibilities of both the trainee and the placement provider whilst also encouraging a collaborative approach to the placement opportunity which includes collaboration with the training course.

The purpose of the placement experience

Placements are a vital part of counselling training, allowing trainee counsellors to apply their knowledge and develop their skills safely under supervision.

Placements allow trainees to learn the role of practitioner whilst working with colleagues and supervisors. As a guided experience the trainee works with clients who have been assessed by an experienced colleague and are considered suitable for trainee work. This helps to support safe, ethical professional practice.

The trainee offers a valuable contribution to the team through their face-to-face work with clients and is able to contribute their insights to case management meetings or group supervision. The role is developmental in nature and should be set out in a way that allows the trainee to grow and develop in both competence and confidence.

The placement is one part of the practitioner's journey towards becoming a safe, ethical and competent practitioner. Wosket (2017, p31) states 'as trainees move from being novices to becoming seasoned practitioners the scaffolding provided by their training may be less and less relied upon'. The placement experience is part of the scaffolding that is gradually relied upon less and less, as the trainee grows in knowledge and experience.

1 Setting up a trainee placement

Section 1: For the placement provider

When we are setting up a placement for a trainee or undertaking a placement as a trainee, it is important to comply with the *Ethical Framework*. There are three sections in the *Ethical Framework*, sections A, B and C. We need to consider all sections to inform our decisions.

A counselling service may have a need for trainees to form part of the practitioner team if there is a rise in client demand.

Additionally, your service may have a specialism which meets the needs of a particular community group for example, young people, people from a particular ethnic or language group or another specialism.

As providers, we need to ensure that the placement is complying with the ethical principles set out in the *Ethical Framework*, these are confidentiality, honesty, transparency, do no harm, best interest, respect, fairness, anti-oppression, trust, collaboration, compassion and integrity and have an ethical rationale for how and why you are offering placements.

Recruitment of trainees

Taking on responsibility for offering placements means we need to seriously consider several questions:

- Is there capacity in relation to experienced staff to manage the placement?
- Is there physical space for a trainee to carry out counselling work?
- Is there space and capacity to provide a supportive work environment for trainees?
- Are there senior colleagues for support and mentoring of trainees?
- Is it possible to enable trainees to have induction training, health and safety training (including lone working), in addition to training in relation to the service specialism if needed?

The placement provider will need to either already be familiar with the training requirements of the training course, or to quickly familiarise themselves with the course training requirements needed.

When selecting trainees a formal recruitment process should be carried out, including application, interview and final selection as would be the expectations of an employed position. Additionally, the trainee should have sufficient information about the service to be able to decide whether the placement is a suitable organisation that they will be able to comfortably train in.

When placement positions are in high demand trainees can feel under pressure to accept a placement simply to get their required clinical hours within the training period. For this reason, the recruitment and selection stage are important to ensure that the trainee is the right fit for the service, has sufficient information about the service, colleagues and clients, and what the requirements are of them as a trainee. This will help to minimise any further problems later on.

Section 2: For the trainee

Trainees who are student members of BACP, or who are undertaking a BACP accredited course are required to understand and work in accordance with BACP's *Ethical Framework 2026*.

The *Ethical Framework 2026* is used by members working directly with clients at all levels and allows us to understand and act on our professional responsibilities. There are three main sections in the framework and we need to use all of these to inform our work.

Trainees will be expected to make contact with placement providers to set up a placement, although the training course may keep a list of providers. The selection process usually involves providing a CV, detailing qualifications, work experience, and any clinical experience you might have. The placement provider might also require you as the trainee to complete an application form and to attend an interview.

If the provider is working with a particular client group it will be important for you and the provider to assess your competence in working with these clients, for example, work with children and young people or work with people in a hospice setting (*Ethical Framework*, Core responsibility 2.1).

You will need to get clear written information about the placement provider at the outset of your placement search. This should help with your decision-making. Useful information could cover induction, training, expectations of attendance at meetings, and supervision expectations. You will need to find out if line management and supervision are independent from each other as outlined in the *Ethical Framework* (*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibility, 4.3).

Some other important things for you to find out will be how clients are assessed and allocated to trainees, and how confidentiality and data protection alongside safeguarding issues are managed in the organisation. These will help ensure that we are complying with our commitments within the *Ethical Framework* to working within our competence, understanding confidentiality, privacy and our obligations to safeguarding disclosures (*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibilities, 2.1, 3.1, 2.4).

Placement positions are often in high demand meaning trainees can feel under huge pressure to accept a placement rather than considering if the placement is the right one for them and if they can offer clients the level of competence and experience they need (*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibility, 2.1).

Whilst it is important to be able to obtain your clinical hours within the training period, it is equally valuable not to feel under pressure to work outside your competence or to feel uncomfortable in the placement setting for example by being left alone in a building with a client, where we could not ensure our own or our clients safety (*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibility, 2.1). Placement providers are required to meet appropriate Health and Safety criteria. You should never be expected to work alone or unsupported while on placement. The quality of the experience should really help you develop your skills as an ethical, safe and competent practitioner.

When attending the interview remember that you are assessing the organisation as well as being assessed, so make sure you use this as an opportunity to assess how you feel with the staff and the ethos of the organisation.

You will need to discuss with the provider the requirements of your training course and not expect them to understand any specific requirements that are particular for your course.

Ideally, you should be able to work with clients using the modality that you are training in, and you will need to be clear about this when liaising with the placement provider. Ensuring that you have the right information at the outset, feel able to ask questions during the interview and afterwards if new questions emerge, and having a real sense of the 'fit' of yourself within the organisation, all these will be key to making your choice.

When signing volunteer agreements be clear about your specific responsibilities. You will need to be sure that clients are aware that you are a volunteer who is undergoing training, this relates to the Ethical principle of transparency, as it important that we give people the information they need to work with us (*Ethical Framework*, Core responsibility 1.2).

2 Supervision

Section 1: For the placement provider

As supervision is necessary for a trainee's learning, and for safe and ethical work with clients, we need to ensure that supervision can be arranged to both meet the standards required on the training course and be suitable for the client group the trainee is working with. Supervision may be provided by you, but you must ensure that it is independent of line management (*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibility, 4.3).

As the placement provider you will need to collaborate with the trainee on choosing a suitable supervisor who meets the needs of the clients within your setting and also meets the requirements of the training programme (*Ethical Framework*, Ethical principle, collaboration).

Section 2: For the trainee

It is your responsibility to have suitable supervision from someone who is qualified, experienced and competent for the work you are undertaking (*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibility, 4.3). Your responsibility will be to manage the needs of the training course and the course modality, the placement needs for your clients and a supervisor that you feel comfortable with. Supervision may be provided by the placement provider, but it must be clearly independent of line management (*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibility, 4.3).

We recognise as practitioners the value of supervision. Supervision enables us to reflect in depth about all aspects of our practice.

We should have a supervision relationship that acts as a safe, collaborative space where you as a practitioner can explore with honesty and transparency all aspects of your client work. This really adds to the value of your reflective learning.

The supervisor should hold their professional responsibilities to your client and yourself in mind, in your work together.

The *Ethical Framework 2026* encourages us to work ethically within the relationships we have with all others in our professional work, not simply our clients. Making ethical decisions is embedded within relationships, and a useful model for ethical decision-making is found in the first section of the framework. This decision-making model can be a helpful structure to use for our supervision and can help to frame the work in a helpful and thoughtful way. It also provides a record of your rationale which is good practice, aids your critical thinking and may be helpful should you need to provide a justification for your decision-making at a later stage (*Ethical Framework*, Section A).

3 Working with clients

Section 1: For the placement provider

Placement providers will be expected to fully assess clients for their suitability to work with trainees so that trainees are not expected to work beyond their competence (*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibility, 2.1). Trainees should not be given clients who are beyond their competence and so decisions around allocation of clients needs to be based on client need and therapist competence rather than waiting list or internal organisational issues like sickness cover.

As providers you will be expected to provide induction on working with clients, information on working in the organisation, health and safety, data protection, safeguarding, use of artificial intelligence, use of social media and other policies necessary for the trainee to carry out the work (*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibility, 2.1). Ideally, you should provide the trainee with a handbook for reference which includes written guidance on policies.

Section 2: For the trainee

As trainees you will need to familiarise yourself with all policies including, but not solely, those relating to health and safety, safeguarding, data protection, social media use and the use of artificial intelligence. You will need to ensure that you understand these policies and act on them. You will need to be clear that you can work in a way which takes account of your own personal safety and the safety of those you work with (*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibility, 2.1).

Trainees are learning to work ethically, and part of this is that we are committed to give people the information they need to make choices about their work with us. To achieve this, you must 'be honest about your work and provide clear, accurate information about services offered, your level of qualification, experience and your competence to undertake that work' (*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibility 1.2a). This means you would need to tell them (or your placement provider would need to tell them) that you are a trainee.

If recording sessions for the purposes of training, you will need to be clear that you are protecting the confidentiality and privacy of clients and acting to meet your legal and professional responsibilities (*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibility, 3.1). You would also need to have an ethical rationale and consider carefully with your supervisor and placement provider before recording sessions for the purpose of training.

When using a digital recorder, you would need to consider Core Responsibility 2.1e, that talks of the risk of AI and digital tools and how you are protecting the confidentiality and privacy of clients (*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibility, 3.1) and how you will collaborate with your client to undertake the recording. Usually the training provider has a robust consent and confidentiality contract in place for recordings, and your tutor should be able to discuss and explore this contract with you. The client being recorded would need to give full **informed** consent to the recording as a contract as well. Discussion with your supervisor is vital to ensure the recording is produced ethically and that you recognise any impact a recording has on the therapeutic relationship.

4 Collaboration with training provider

Section 1: For the provider

As a placement provider you should use the ethical principle of compassion to understand and acknowledge the trainee's position (*Ethical Framework*, Ethical principle, compassion). The trainee is in a liminal space where they are working with client issues whilst working within the bounds of their competence, they are also balancing the requirements of their specific course. This means they are in a semi-professional role. The training course holds a lot of power in the ability to pass or fail a trainee's work.

It is therefore helpful for the benefit of client work, and for adherence to the ethical principle of collaboration to attempt to establish a reasonable working relationship with the training course. This ensures that they can be alerted to any concerns at the outset of the concern being identified (*Ethical Framework*, Ethical principle, collaboration).

Additionally, ensuring that you are familiar with, and agree to the four-way contract for the trainee, will provide a level of reassurance to the trainee, and will ensure you comply with the Core responsibility of giving people the information they need to make choices about their work with us (*Ethical Framework*, Core responsibility, 1.2).

Section 2: For the trainee

It will be your responsibility to ensure that you build appropriate collaboration between the training provider, the placement provider and yourself.

This may be in the form of providing the contract for the placement, ensuring the supervision meets the requirements and ideally sharing contact details between the provider and the training course. This ensures you have met your obligations to build appropriate relationships and work collaboratively with people (*Ethical Framework*, Core responsibility, 1.2; Ethical principle: collaboration).

5 Endings

Section1: For the provider

Training providers need to consider the impact on their clients of any unexpected endings which means you will need to have specific policies on endings which are understood by the trainee, the training course and the placement provider. The *Ethical Framework* requires that breaks and endings are well managed, meaning as an organisation you should ensure that a clinical will is in place to minimise the impact on clients should the trainee experience a serious unexpected illness for example (*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibility, 4.5).

Section 2: For the trainee

If you need to end the work with your clients you will need to minimise the impact of these endings for them. The service provider should have a clinical will system set up for all trainees so that any unexpected ending can be suitably managed in order to lessen the impact on clients.

This may mean that someone close to you like a partner needs to return a laptop or similar, for example, and you will need to be sure that this person is aware of this obligation on your behalf and that they are willing to liaise with the placement provider (*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibility, 4.5).

Consideration needs to be given to leaving the placement once clinical hours have been met, and whether this meets the Ethical principle of meeting the best interests of your clients.

If there is a need to end with your clients you will need to ensure that you give advance notice when approaching an ending having discussed with your supervisor that this is a safe course of action ((*Ethical Framework*, Core Responsibilities, 4.3, 4.5).

Developing an ethically considered rationale for ending with clients ensures that the decision has been carefully considered, ideally through a supervisory discussion (*Ethical Framework*, Section A, and Core Responsibility, 4.3).

6 Exit review

For both the trainee and the provider

An exit review gives both the service provider and the trainee an opportunity to debrief, an occasion which provides learning on both sides. There is the chance to tie up loose ends (say, of client documentation), but also to acknowledge and celebrate what has been achieved.

7 Application to practice

The following section is aimed at translating the theory covered in this resource into practice with short case studies. It also gives you the opportunity to think about your own therapeutic practice by offering questions for you to reflect on.

The variety and complexity of issues facing the staff of a therapy placement are illustrated by the two following situations, which are referenced to the *Ethical Framework 2026*.

1. As a senior staff member working at a domestic abuse centre you are experiencing symptoms of chronic stress, including disturbed sleeping and eating patterns, low mood and irritability. You are aware of this. Two other key colleagues have recently left the service, and have been replaced by fairly new trainees, who are uncomfortable about intervening with your obvious stress symptoms, but are also left feeling out of their depth. The Ethical principles refer to acting in the best interest and promoting the wellbeing of service users by prioritising their needs. In this situation, you have attempted to follow that principle of best interests, but you realise this may be at a cost to your own wellbeing.

How could you identify and act on the balance of the ethical principles of best interest against the Core responsibility 2.1 of 'Maintain our health and wellbeing'.

- You could refer to the ethical decision-making rationale here to ask questions of your own behaviour regarding what the ethical issues are and how best to resolve them (*Ethical Framework*: rationale for ethical decision-making)

- You could collaborate with your line manager to identify the potential harm to clients your actions could cause (*Ethical Framework*: ethical principles do no harm and act in the best interest)

- You could recognise that your actions have not kept you or colleagues safe and that this could have an impact on the learning experience of the two trainees and therefore have a wider impact on clients (*Ethical Framework*, Core responsibilities 2.1 and 2.3).

2. A second-year trainee discusses with his mentor a situation concerning a client who arrived in the UK a year ago, a woman in her late 20s, who is always brought by a family member to the sessions and collected at the end. Her competence in English is adequate for a therapy session but is hampered by lack of fluency. Her presenting issues are homesickness and anxiety, as well as a chronic medical problem which prevents her living independently or seeking employment. The trainee experiences her as 'young for her age', and quite naïve and vulnerable. In the third session, the client begins to refer to activity in the family house involving young people from her country, mostly girls, who arrive, stay a few days or weeks, and then leave suddenly. She states that they seem nervous and 'don't know where they are'. This activity increases the client's anxiety and sense of displacement, partly because she would like to make connections with the new arrivals, but her relatives have told her not to concern herself with them and to keep away.

How could you as a trainee fulfil your commitments to the *Ethical Framework* and address your concerns with this placement client?

- You could raise the concern with your line manager having first discussed it with your supervisor (*Ethical Framework*, Core responsibility 2.4).

- You could also use the ethical decision-making rationale to help frame your supervision discussion, helping you to clarify the issues of concern (*Ethical Framework*: rationale for ethical decision-making)

- You will need to keep appropriate factual records should there be a legal obligation to share these records (*Ethical Framework*, Core responsibilities 3.2 and 3.3).

- You will need to collaborate with the provider should a safeguarding referral or a legal concern need to be disclosed (*Ethical Framework*, Core responsibilities 2.4, 3.2 and 3.3).

About the author

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