

## PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES POLICY

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At Patchouli Therapy, I recognise the importance of maintaining professional boundaries. This policy expands the Service Terms and Conditions (or Service Agreement - Short) sections 11 and 12.

### *11. Contacting me*

*I may not be immediately available by telephone on 07976 355 705. I do not answer my mobile phone when I am with clients, travelling or otherwise unavailable outside of the normal working hours. I generally do not answer mobile phone calls or emails when I am in a session with clients, and I cannot accept an emergency call.*

*At these times, you may leave a message on my confidential voicemail, and I will respond as soon as possible.*

*Please note that for non-urgent matters, it may take up to 24 hours for a response. If, for any unforeseen reason, you do not hear from me within 24 hours, or I am unable to reach you. You feel you cannot wait for a return call. If you feel unable to keep yourself safe and in case of emergency, 1) contact your Local GP, or 2) call 111 or 999 or ask to speak to the mental health worker on call.*

*I will make every attempt to inform you in advance of planned absences and provide you with the name and phone number of the mental health professional covering my practice.*

In addition to the above boundary, contact me may not be possible as I may be in a session with clients. During this time, I cannot be contacted, and my phone will be in 'focused' mode. It is possible to leave me a message, text or email. However, if I do not respond to you within 24 hours of your message, it may be due to exceptional, personal, or unforeseeable circumstances that prevent me from responding to you. Please be patient, I will respond as soon as possible.

Please note that I am available to work between 9am and 7pm and may not respond outside of these hours.

If you require additional support outside of these hours, please contact me for external resources and organisations *on my Referral List*, which can guide how they can assist you.

Generally, you may contact me on any medium of your preference, whether it is by a phone call, text message, WhatsApp message, email, or via the Portal message. However, please note that if you message me irregularly from different mediums, it may take me a while to respond. Please be consistent with your preferred method of contact.

You may look me up on social media, but please note that I will not and cannot 'connect' with you on social media due to professional boundary issues. I am unable to respond to you via any social media applications. It is not personal that I cannot connect with you during the time that we work together, and sometimes after our therapeutic relationship has ended. This is because we are in a therapeutic alliance, and a professional boundary needs to be adhered to.

### *12. Other Rights & Boundaries*

*During therapy, if you are unhappy with what is happening in the session, I hope you will discuss it with me so that I can respond to your concerns. I hope to address any issues in a sensitive manner. Such comments or grievances will be taken seriously and handled with care and respect.*

*You may also request that I refer you to another therapist, and you are free to end therapy at any time you feel uncomfortable, waiving any notices. You have the right to considerate, safe, and respectful care, without discrimination based on race, ethnicity, colour, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, national origin, or source of payment. You have the right to ask questions about any aspects of therapy and my specific training and experience. You have the right to expect that I will not engage in social, casual, or intimate relationships with you or with former clients. You have the right to expect that I will not engage in media social contact with clients or former clients on any social networking websites. You have the right to expect that I will not engage with you when passing. If you acknowledge the encounter, you have the right to expect that I will not discuss therapy with you outside of the therapy room. You have the right to expect that I will not call/visit you in any form of social event. Should we meet at a social*

*event, you have the right to expect that I will not engage with you or your party directly. As I practice and live in the Marlow, Bucks area, I will not join you outside of the clinic in and around Marlow.*

*During therapy, you have the right to expect that I will not engage or interact with you using social media sites for personal purposes. You may be able to follow me on social media sites (Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, etc.) for news, blogs, my latest articles on services at the Patchouli Therapy website, but please be aware that I may not follow you or accept you as a friend for personal reasons. Please note that this is a professional, ethical boundary, and it is not a secret rejection.*

*You have a right to expect that during therapy, I will not be able to ethically see anyone connected to you in another form of therapeutic intervention, unless you have correctly requested couple therapy at the beginning of the work. I will not be able to see your spouse/partner or any family members during your time with Patchouli Therapy, for ethical reasons. You have the right to update the changes to your circumstances at any time, and you can discuss these terms and conditions with me at your convenience. You have the right to change your mind at any time, provided that you give notice. Please honour the advice so that I can receive your feedback on how I can improve the services for the future. I welcome your feedback at any time so that services during your therapy can meet your needs.*

*I reserve the right to discuss any changes to these terms and conditions with you at any time, and I will ensure that I advise you of such changes in advance of any changes to therapy. Any alterations, such as holidays, sickness, or anything else, I will ensure that you are given the same required amount of notice as per Section 6.*

*After therapy, you can expect that I may not engage or interact with you socially unless you initiate the interaction. After such time has passed, it will be appropriate and without any ethical or boundary issues. You can expect that no other contact will be made unless you agree to disclose your email address for feedback and an occasional marketing campaign, and this will be the only form of email interaction. You can expect that your records and other therapeutic notes are kept safe in a locked cupboard. See section 8. You have the right to keep details of any requested records for your information. You have the right to keep details of my contact for any future interventions and recommendations for your friends and family.*

In addition to the above wordings. You may address anything within the professional boundaries, T&C or any questions about Patchouli Therapy's policies and procedures at any time. I work with you to build a therapeutic alliance; thus, this is a safe space free from judgments. Here are the details of the various boundaries in the therapeutic relationship.

### **What are Boundaries in Counselling?**

Boundaries are the perimeters of the therapeutic relationship – the frame within which the work takes place.

Clear boundaries promote trust in the practitioner and provide clarity about the purpose and nature of the relationship. All interpersonal relationships have boundaries, often unspoken, which are mutually understood limitations as to what is appropriate in a particular situation.

In counselling, the boundaries are made explicit in the contracting stage of the relationship, and are mutually agreed and understood by both therapist and client.

The boundaries create clarity for both parties around expectations and a safe frame for the work of therapy.

### **Time, Number of Sessions and Location**

These are the practical boundaries relevant to each encounter. It is essential to be explicit about the length and frequency of the sessions being offered, whether the work is to be open-ended or time-limited, and when and where the counselling sessions will be held.

I offer a 50-minute session, but it may be extended to 60 minutes as needed. I practised an open-ended approach, and you are in charge of the number of sessions you require. I do not advise a minimum number of sessions because I believe that there may be multiple facets to what brings you to therapy. I leave the determination of the number of sessions required and their timing to you.

Clarity about these practical elements helps to provide a transparent frame in which the more interpersonal aspects of the relationship can be allowed to develop securely.

### Dual Relationships

When a client and therapist engage in another relationship or interaction outside of their professional roles, this is known as a dual relationship.

Dual relationships can manifest in a number of ways:

- A family/friend connection
- A business relationship
- Online interaction, e.g. social media
- A collegial relationship
- Neighbours
- Same religious congregation, shared group, hobby or club.

The BACP ethical framework states:

“...any dual or multiple relationships will be avoided where the risks of harm to the client outweigh any benefits to the client.” (BACP, 2018).

This guidance encourages us to employ sound ethical decision-making in all situations where dual relationships may arise, and to proceed with caution, avoiding dual relationships whenever possible. It is crucial to use supervision when there is a possibility of a dual relationship, and ethical bodies, including the BACP, will also offer advice and guidance to their members.

### Self-Disclosure

When determining the appropriateness of personal disclosure in the therapeutic relationship, it is essential to consider the therapeutic purpose. Used effectively, self-disclosure can promote relational depth in the therapeutic encounter; however, used thoughtlessly, it can miss the client's frame of reference and appear confusing or hurtful.

Relational self-disclosure (a disclosure relating to how the therapist feels about the relationship or the work in the here-and-now) is likely to offer more potential for nurturing the relationship than a disclosure about something in the therapist's life outside of therapy (Wosket, 2016).

I will use self-disclosure only to help clarify my meaning in the right context, thereby developing the therapeutic relationship.

### Touch

Some therapists offer hugs or other touch (such as hand-holding) as part of the therapeutic relationship. Any intervention involving touch needs to be managed in a considered way, and reflection in supervision about the purpose and value of touch is essential, as well as discussion with the client about the therapeutic meaning.

An ongoing dialogue in the therapy room helps to avoid misunderstandings and ensure safety. This is particularly important for clients who may have experienced relational trauma.

I consider and observe whether any form of touch is appropriate. I will never initiate any form of touch.

### Gifts

Sometimes clients may wish to offer their therapist a gift at the end of therapy or on a special occasion. Some therapists may choose not to accept gifts from their clients. To avoid an upsetting rejection, it is a good idea to make this policy clear from the outset of therapy.

Regarding gifts, I have specific policies in place, so it's essential to familiarise yourself with this policy. Often, expensive gifts or cash gifts are not permitted.

### Out of Session Contact

Particularly relevant to private practice, I may offer clients communication options between sessions, either for a fee or as part of the service. This might include phone, email or text contact.

Contact us regarding appointments, cancellations, or amendments, and we will respond in a timely and reasonable manner, even if we need to follow up on multiple communication exchanges.

It is essential that any between-session contact is discussed and that a realistic amount is agreed upon. A sudden change in the therapeutic frame can be unsettling, and any changes to the contract around out-of-session contact must be managed sensitively. If you would like to discuss this further, please bring it up in the session at any time.

I reserve the right **not to** respond between sessions if you contact me regarding the contents of some of the things you disclosed in the session, which may take me more than 20 minutes to reply. However, you may contact me and share, even if I don't respond.

### Social Media

In the modern world, we must consider how our personal and professional online presence may impact the therapeutic relationship and ensure we maintain online boundaries in a way that protects the integrity of the therapeutic relationship and promotes trust.

The 2018 BACP ethical framework addresses the issue of social media use: "reasonable care is taken to separate and maintain a distinction between our personal and professional presence on social media where this could result in harmful dual relationships with clients" (BACP, 2018).

It is generally considered good practice to avoid following or searching for our clients online, not to accept 'friend' requests from clients on social media, and never to post about clients online. Supervision is the setting for discussing client work.

I will not accept your 'friend' requests on social media such as Facebook, Instagram, and LinkedIn because it is an inappropriate connection due to the professional boundary. I will not follow you on any social media sites or look you up either. If I see a recommendation from a social media website to connect with you, I will take no action.

### Confidentiality

Counsellors have a duty to maintain client confidentiality by not discussing client material inappropriately, storing client data securely and in accordance with the law, and ensuring clients are clear about the limits to privacy and when confidentiality may need to be breached.

### When Boundaries are Crossed

Boundaries can create ethical dilemmas when working with clients, and if a therapeutic boundary is crossed or becomes blurred, it is likely to be unsettling for both therapist and client. When a therapeutic boundary has been crossed, depending on the nature and seriousness of the violation, the therapist has an ethical duty to:

- Mitigate harm where possible and ethical.
- Take the situation to supervision.

- If a student informs the learning establishment.
- Inform the organisational manager where appropriate.
- In some cases, it is appropriate to inform the professional body. Seeking help from more experienced practitioners at the earliest possible opportunity helps to ensure that any harm to the client or the relationship can be kept to a minimum and that best practice is upheld.

If you have any questions on crossed boundaries, please bring them into the session for exploration.