



The Special Nature of the Psychotherapy Relationship

A professional relationship with a professional psychotherapist has only one purpose—the client’s emotional, psychological, and personal well-being. Because clients disclose to their clinicians many deeply felt personal thoughts and experiences, the relationship becomes very close and very important. Sometimes clients come to want the relationship to become more than a professional service relationship: a friendship, a dating relationship, or a business association. Although these feelings are understandable, it is necessary for all clients to recognize that there is only one relationship with the clinician and that is a service relationship.

I cannot at any time, during or after your course of treatment, be anything but your therapist. I cannot, now or in the future, be your friend, your client or customer, your supervisor, your teacher, or your date. I cannot ever, now or in the future, become sexually involved with you. I cannot accept goods or services from you in exchange for my services. If any of these things occurred, I would lose my ability to be objective about your needs and to serve you with only your well-being in mind.

As part of our initial conversations, I will explore whether we have any situations that would put us into social or business contact with each other. I will also be concerned about social or business ties I may have with your close relatives or even friends. We will discuss such situations thoroughly. If we cannot guarantee that we can manage these existing situations without conflict of interest or threats to your privacy, I will offer to refer you to another professional.

I will not enter into a working agreement with any person on whom I cannot concentrate totally and objectively as my client. In addition, it is my professional and ethical obligation to ensure that once we begin your treatment, our relationship remains solely professional. If, after we begin working together, either of us experiences difficulties in maintaining the singular focus of our work, we will discuss the issues as part of therapy. If they cannot be resolved, it will be necessary to end our service relationship, and I will refer you to another source of service.

I want you to understand how seriously my profession—as well as other mental health professions and others—takes the exclusivity of the therapeutic relationship. The *Code of Ethics* of the National Association of Social Workers requires that I not exploit our relationship to meet my own needs, that I avoid any conflict of interest with your needs, and that under no circumstances do I engage in sexual activities with any client. Were I to violate any of these rules, I would be heavily sanctioned by my profession, and I would be sanctioned by my licensing board. Thus, it is in both of our interests to be just one thing to each other: You are *only* my client, and I am *only* your therapist.

Finally, in the same way that you can expect total professionalism from me, you can expect the same from everyone associated with this setting: support staff, emergency back-up clinicians, and anyone else you might encounter here. We are all committed to providing our clients a setting in which they maintain dignity and experience freedom from any form of disrespect or inequitable treatment, including sexual harassment in any form and any other form of discrimination. If ever you, as my client, have concerns about any of these issues, please bring them to my attention at once.