

## Supervising someone who is not a counsellor

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On behalf Ethics Committee

Many counsellors provide supervision for a variety of people who are not counsellors but, whose roles benefit from external supervision. Supervision is helpful for a variety of roles other than counselling. It can be interesting and very rewarding work for counsellors to undertake. Many ministers, pastoral workers, case managers, leaders and others in helping work seek supervision to reflect on their work, add to their skills and help keep them and those they work with more safe.

Supervising non counsellors has some issues that have to be considered, worked through and understandings and agreements articulated to make the future clear and ensure non-culpability for our supervision practice.

When supervising counsellors or like practitioners e.g. social workers there is the comfort and safety in the wrapping of a code of ethics and practice. When supervising ministers similarly many will have a code of conduct or some documentation about what an effective or good minister does and does not do. If they don't then ask them about it.

A rather more challenging issue for us as qualified and membered counselling supervisors is to supervise a counsellor or someone who sees themselves as a counsellor, who may or may not have a counselling qualification and, who is not membered. This is someone who either cannot get membership for various reasons or, who has no interest in getting a professional membership. For me this issue that arises from time to time raises some questions:

1. What are they saying about themselves as a self-described professional person by not committing to a training and/or a code of ethics?
2. What are they saying counselling is if it has no formal boundaries or parameters?
3. What are we as counsellors saying about what we think is safe and ethical practice?

We do not live in a world of no exceptions and there are occasions when we might agree to supervise someone who is 'considering' membership or anticipating they will start a training and membership process. Such supervisory relationships probably have a time limit e.g. within the next six months the supervisee is committed to commence a membership process.

When we knowingly supervise a non-membered and or non-qualified counsellor we are challenged by the question of what we, and they, are saying counselling is. Our definition is something like a body of knowledge and set of skills that can be used in relationship with another person to work safely, ethically and effectively with client's needs/issues. The issue of safety is bottom line i.e. do no harm. What is safe and ethical practice? As a registered nurse I have personally never had an issue with counsellors becoming membered or even registered under statute. Most helping professionals are now under statute and have accountability processes that help keep clients safe and to ensure good and safe care is the desired norm. What are we saying therefore about safety and good counselling when we provide supervision for a non-membered, not intending to be membered counsellor or focused helper?

Whilst this is a small number of people it is potentially a lot of work when a supervisee has no formal vision of safety and no agreed to knowledge of the criteria that constitutes safe practice. People sometimes, out of 'not knowing' think if they are being supervised by a qualified and membered counsellor of repute that they will 'be ok' to practise. By providing supervision in this instance without a full investigative conversation is, in effect, colluding with non-professionalism. The question of liability then sits with us. If a non-membered person has a complaint to the Health and

Disability Commission about their practice, then questions about the counsellor who supervises them and the nature and efficacy of the supervision may be raised.

The issue of probity whilst not a specific category in our code of ethics is implicit in the statement of faith and rationale in the code. This calls us to act with integrity in all aspects of our practice including the supervision we provide for others. The British Association of Counselling and Psychotherapy code is helpful in regards to informing clients about counselling. Point 60. says 'All information about services should be honest, accurate, avoid unjustifiable claims, and be consistent with maintaining the good standing of the profession' (BACP 2013) We have a like statement in our own code of ethics and practice 3.2. 'Counsellors continue to develop, maintain and encourage high standards of professional preparation, competence, and complete on-going personal and professional development' (NZCCA 2015) It is therefore important to ensure those we supervise represent themselves from like professional guidelines that qualified and membered counsellors use.

I think it is wise to think very carefully about who we supervise and what might they be saying about their practice as a result of being in supervision with us. It is always good practice to take the extraordinary and atypical requests for supervision to our own supervision before we commit to a new supervision relationship. It is always good practice to ask what the counsellor/helper/other found helpful and not so helpful with their previous supervisor, did they end the relationship in an ok way, are they professionally membered, how much personal development work have they done, have they had any complaints, what is their hope for this supervision relationship. It is easy to get caught into agreeing to a supervision relationship and not ask the objective questions especially when a new supervisee wants you to 'get caught in not asking such questions'. For people who work as 'church workers' or pastoral workers it is good to have a conversation about what they see as pastoral care compared with counselling and what is their attitude about referral. Such conversation, whilst somewhat investigative for us as supervisors, can create a clearer understanding and often give some helpful direction to the educative aspect of their future supervision.

If I have learned any wisdom in my time as a supervisor it is to use the valuable information that I often have, sit on, react to yet do nothing with. Hirsch (2008) calls this coasting in the countertransference. If you have a hunch or reaction in the early stages of a new supervision relationships then do something with it. Find a way to share and work with that hunch. It just might be true and really important in deepening and expanding the process. Better to surface and test the data we have rather than reap the potentially negative consequences of not testing it further on.

British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy (2012) *Ethical Frameworks for Good Practice in Counselling & Psychotherapy*, Leicestershire, Great Britain: Author

Hirsch I (2008) *Coasting in the Countertransference – Conflicts of Self Interest between Analyst and Patient*, New York: Analytic Press

New Zealand Christian Counsellors Association. (2015). *Code of ethics and practice*. Auckland, New Zealand: Author