

TERMINATIONS AND ABANDONMENT CONCERNS

INTERRUPTIONS OF SERVICES

- Paramount consideration must be given to the welfare of the client and to the continuity of care.
- Counselors (in solo or private practice) ethically are required to have in transfer plan in place to ensure continuity of care in the event that services are interrupted by factors such as counselor unavailability due to relocation, illness, disability, or death. (See Transfer Plans)

TERMINATION VS. ABANDONMENT

First, know the difference between abandonment and termination. Abandonment is not the same as treatment termination. Counselors should have a clear understanding of when a therapeutic relationship should end.

The therapeutic relationship can be discontinued when clients:

The client is not benefiting from therapy

The client may be harmed by the treatment

The client needs a higher level of care

Client's issues are outside of counselor's expertise

Client no longer needs therapy

There are conflicts of interest that are unresolvable

Counselor's objectivity has been compromised

The client has threaten the counselor

ABANDONMENT

Client abandonment is defined as the premature termination of the professional treatment relationship by the counselor without adequate notice, without therapeutic reason, or without the client's involvement. This unilateral termination of the clinical relationship is a form of negligence.

Abandonment occurs when a counselor inappropriately ends treatment, such as halting needed therapy with no notice. In comparison, many times counselors and clients continue with therapy beyond the point of necessity. While dependent clients can make it difficult to end treatment appropriately, the counselor must sometimes make the therapeutic decision to appropriately end the clinical relationship.

TERMINATION AND INFORMED CONSENT

One of the reasons information on termination and referrals is in the consent form is to help educate the client. Counselors should take some time, as early on as possible in the clinical relationship, to verbally discuss with the client this information. This can help head off termination and/or referral dilemmas. During this discussion, cover the differences between short- and long-term therapy and all the other reasons that can and do lead to treatment termination. Talk with your clients periodically about this topic. Counselors and clients, often, both don't like to talk about termination/referrals, because it brings up uncomfortable feelings for clients and counselors alike. Many of our life endings (breakups, divorces, graduations, broken friendships, being fired, death) provoke feelings of sadness, anger, rejection and abandonment. Counseling often results in a meaningful relationship and evoke difficult emotions when therapy ends. Instead, counseling can be a place to discuss these feelings to promote a healthy closure.