



**Therapy Centre Services – Guidance Document
Working with suicidal clients**

<p>Definition</p>	<p>The aim of this guidance document is to help clarify how you might respond in a situation where you feel a client presents at risk. For this purpose 'risk' is usefully defined in the context of our statement of understanding, which is the agreement made between the Counsellor working as part of our Counselling service, and your client. The Counselling service's Statement of Understanding is shared at the start of the counselling relationship with the client.</p> <p>Risk would be viewed as a client expressing intent to commit suicide, or where self-harm is severe enough to suggest that it might be immediately life-threatening. Risk to others would also include child protection (physical, sexual, emotional or neglect), or an expressed intent by the client to harm another person or commit a terrorist act.</p>
<p>Acknowledgement of working with uncertainty when working with suicide risk</p> <p>Discrimination between 'thought' and 'intent'</p> <p>Encouragement to talk to clients about suicide</p>	<p>It is acknowledged that working with clients at risk is difficult and it is not possible to accurately predict possible client actions in the future. In working with clients at risk, being able to talk to your client openly and honestly about their feelings or their situation will offer the best possible opportunity to decide upon how to best proceed. Any response to a suicidal client at risk needs to be mediated with an acknowledgement in the difference between 'thought' and 'intent'. For example, an expressed thought about suicide does not necessarily communicate intent. It is important to feel sufficiently confident to talk explicitly with your client about their thoughts, to help gauge intent. Our agency guidelines for responding to such situations are outlined in our practice direction below.</p>
<p>Practice direction</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. If you are concerned about the immediate safety of your client or another person, it is important to consult with your Manager and / or another member of your team, and where possible with your Supervisor – if



Placing decision making process in context of working with my client

possible before your client leaves the session. However, if your client wants to leave the session before you have been able to consult, they must be permitted to do so. Wherever possible, inform your client before they leave the session of what you intend to do e.g. contact their GP, the police (in emergencies) etc. In the event of terrorist concerns, it is not appropriate to discuss these concerns directly with your client. It is important however to speak to the Director of the Counselling service as soon as possible. Wherever possible we advise completing an ***Informed Letter of Consent*** with your client after each disclosure where any action will be taken.

2. Wherever possible, every intervention or contact with a third party regarding the client should be undertaken with the clients explicit permission. In exceptional circumstances we may need to initiate contact with a third party to help safeguard the client's wellbeing without their consent, but with their knowledge. This would only happen in consultation with a member of the Core team or with your Supervisor. An informed letter of consent should be completed and signed after every disclosure, and where the client gives permission to initiate contact with a third party.
3. The aim of consulting with your Supervisor and another member of the Core team is to ensure that all possible options are explored fully, and that you are supported in your work and not left in an isolated position, either professionally or personally.
4. Therapy Centre Services acknowledges that working with clients at risk is a difficult and stressful process. The aim is to ensure that you are fully supported at all times. Additionally, as a Counsellor you are not expected to undertake psychiatric diagnoses or to be able to fully predict the future actions of your client: risk assessment is an inexact and subjective process. It is however important to respond to your own concerns both with the client directly and within the service team.
5. Following our internal risk process is required at all times. Using our ***Risk Assessment Policy*** and accurately recording the risk level is important.
6. Where risk is assessed at 3 or above, and in all cases where the client has been referred by an employer, the risk level should be discussed with your client and the client encouraged to agree to signing an Informed Letter of Consent to share this information with their Employer / GP or other Third Party.
7. In all cases where risk is disclosed, Counsellors should complete a ***Suicide Safety Plan*** with their client and offer relevant signposting and support for the client to access between sessions.



<p>Expectations regarding record keeping</p>	<p>Ensure that you record accurately and fully in the client notes your concerns and how you responded to those concerns paying particular attention to the following;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The specific nature of the risk identified- Any relevant discussion between client and counsellor regarding the risk(s) including client responses- Any agreements made with the client in response to the risk, or any other specific actions taken, including consultation with the core agency team or Supervisor <p>If the decision is made to break confidentiality against the clients expressed wishes, but with their knowledge, notes should include the following information;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The reasons why you as the Counsellor believed breaking confidentiality was in the client's best interests- What the purpose for breaking confidentiality was, e.g. referral for psychiatric assessment- Why it was not possible to gain client consent. This may be because the client was unable to give their informed consent at that point due to the level of their emotional / physical distress, or they had left the session and were not contactable, or that the client did not have the mental capacity to provide informed consent at the time.
<p>Support options</p>	<p>In the event of a client suicide or other serious incident involving a client, Therapy Centre Services acknowledges that in addition to procedural management within the organisation, it is very important to offer support and help to those directly involved. In addition, this acknowledgement will include the implications for the wider team. The nature and extent of such support will be influenced by the expressed needs of those involved, but might include;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- The need for those involved to speak to the Core team and access support / debrief



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	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The need for those involved to leave the service, but have a defined point of contact with someone in the service- Organised time with the Supervisor, a Senior Counsellor or Head of Service- The management of other ongoing client work and the needs of existing clients- An opportunity for the team to meet and discuss other responses needed
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