

UNIT 3, Assignment 4

Ethical Referral

4 Understand the concepts of ethical referral

4.1 Explain what is meant by ethical referral

4.2 Explain reasons for referral

4.3 Explain referral processes

4.4 Explain when, how and why confidentiality and boundaries may be breached

Students should complete an essay in which they explain: what is meant by ethical referral; reasons for referral; referral processes; when, how and why confidentiality and boundaries may be breached.

Word count: 800 minimum.

4.1

An ethical referral can be defined as an advised client transition to another support service, considered within the context of an ethical framework. Reasons for referrals and limits to confidentiality should be explained to the client prior to beginning the counselling process.

4.2

An ethical referral can be considered for different reasons. For instance, if a client is not making progress the counsellor may direct the client towards an alternative form of therapy. This could occur if a client is dealing with substance misuse, or is experiencing severe hallucinations such as hearing voices. However, referrals can be made for other reasons, including if counsellors feel that there is too much transference occurring within the dynamic which may be hindering the counselling process. The counsellor may also advise the client to seek alternative modes of help, if it seems that the client is presenting issues which are not related to the counselling service. These could include seeking medical advice, legal advice, financial advice and even someone looking for companionship.

It is the responsibility of a counsellor to assess the progress and needs of a client with whom they are working. Through reflection, communication and feedback from the client, a counsellor may sometimes arrive at the decision that a client requires more specialist treatment which is beyond their capabilities and training - which is when a referral should occur.

4.3

For the sake of ease, it is advisable that a counsellor keeps an up to date log of information regarding different support services: from local GP drop-in times, to legal information, to alternative therapeutic solutions.

The fine details of the process may differ from agency to agency. One approach is contacting the agency whilst the client is present, so that the relevant enquiries can be made regarding appointments - and so that the client has a chance to speak to someone on the phone and discuss their next steps. Another approach is writing a referral letter to the agency. A copy of the letter should also be given to the client so they are aware of the communication and also aware of the information that has been shared. It is also advised that the initial draft of the letter could be done in collaboration with the client, to ensure they agree with the content.

A referral can be unsettling for a client - especially if they have established a good relationship with their current counsellor - so it is the counsellor's professional responsibility to make this transition as smooth as possible. The term 'ethical' is used in reference to the decisions made by the counsellor which will be determined by their own professional integrity, their humility and their theoretical understanding of different counselling practices. As stated within the BACP's ethical framework, a counsellor must work within their own professional competence; this means evaluating where they may not be competent in delivering specialised services.

4.4

In line with an ethical framework and legal responsibility, a counsellor should always be aware of issues around confidentiality. Before confidentiality is breached however, it is advisable that a counsellor seeks professional advice from a senior member of staff. The most common reason for breaching confidentiality is if the client is a threat to themselves or others - in which case the client must inform someone who has the professional ability to keep them safe. This could include the hospitalisation of a client who can be supported through further mental health support and can be monitored for positive progress. This can sometimes be a difficult decision to arrive at, especially if the client has admitted to considering suicide. The counsellor must judge the imminence of their decision to consider suicide; if the client is at risk of immediate harm then the counsellor is entitled to contact the client's GP or the emergency services.

There are also legal reasons why confidentiality could be breached. These could include terrorist threats, criminal investigations or investigations into missing people.

Within the UK, according to the Terrorism Act 2000 (Section 38B), the counsellor must inform the police if the client has spoken of being involved in or planning acts of terrorism. In this situation, the police can be informed without the client having knowledge of the communication. (Webber, 2013)

According to Section 21 of the Road Traffic Act (1991), if a counsellor is approached by the police after having a client divulge information about a road traffic collision, then the counsellor would be legally obliged to pass on the information given. (Webber, 2013)

Equally, if the client divulges information regarding a missing child who is under legal protection or in police care, then the counsellor could be obliged to share this information by order of the Family Court. (Webber, 2013)

Due the complexity of laws surrounding confidentiality, it is always advisable that a counsellor should seek the professional advice from their supervisor or senior staff.

References

Webber, Libby, 12/07/2013, Southsea Counselling: 'What is 'confidentiality' in Counselling?'
Accessed on <http://www.southseacounselling.co.uk/2013/07/12/what-is-confidentiality-in-counselling/> at 22/05/18