

Harm: Intentional and Unintentional

Counsellors and psychotherapists understand the importance of the protection of clients' wellbeing. However, harm by therapists can be both intentional and unintentional. Consider the following scenarios and reflect on how harm might have been avoided.

CASE STUDIES

Intentional harm

- **Susie** is a counsellor who works in independent practice. She insists that clients pay in advance for their sessions (up to 12 sessions), but will often cancel sessions with no notice and refuses a refund.
- **John** has worked as a psychotherapist for several years. He often finds himself sexually attracted to clients and believes that, if managed carefully, sexual relationships with ongoing clients can be helpful so that they can 'experience a positive sexual experience'.
- **Suky** works at a counsellor in a health care setting, working with people with long-term mental health problems. She offers individual 'psychodynamic counselling' and a variety of therapy groups. Her employer believes she is qualified in both individual and group therapies, whereas in fact Suky has never had any training.

CASE STUDIES

Unintentional harm

- **Saya** is a counselling trainer. Due to procedural and assessment changes within her college she is forced to make changes to the training curriculum. This means that a previous piece of work already submitted is now discounted. The trainees on the course feel angry that this change has been made without any prior consultation or warning.
- **Jenny** is a psychotherapist working in independent practice. Her fees for therapy have been set for some time, and when considering this she realises that she must increase her fees to remain financially viable. She increases her fees with little notice to her clients, causing anger and distress.
- **Alan** is a counsellor in a further education college. As part of his role he is asked to join a Welfare Committee. At his first meeting he bumps into a client of his who is also on the Committee. Alan's client feels embarrassed and uncomfortable. Alan had not discussed with his client at the beginning of counselling how he and his client might manage 'boundary issues' (e.g., meeting outside on campus).