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A HANDBOOK FOR VICTIMS

AND VICTIM ADVOCATES

ON

SEXUAL EXPLOITATION BY

COUNSELORS AND THERAPISTS

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***It's Never OK:
A Handbook for Victims and Victim Advocates
on
Sexual Exploitation by Counselors and Therapists***

Written by:

Public Education Work Group of the Task Force on Sexual
Exploitation by Counselors and Therapists

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Published by:

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Typesetting and printing by the men incarcerated at the
Minnesota Correctional Facility—Stillwater.

May, 1988

Local rape crisis centers are usually good sources of additional information and support for victims of sexual exploitation.

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"It's really hard to explain how powerful the therapist seems to the client. He is supposed to be the expert, the trusted person who knows what is best for you. I wish I hadn't ignored my uneasiness and confusion when he started touching me. I guess I wanted him to take my pain away and to take care of me. It turned out that I was taking care of his needs most of the time. I was someone for him to confide in, to hold, to be flattered by."

INTRODUCTION

Sexual or romantic involvement between a counselor and a client is never okay. Such behavior is considered taboo by all groups in the mental health professions. It is both unethical and illegal behavior. The consequences are destructive and far reaching for the client who has become the victim of the counselor.

Within therapy relationships, it is common for clients to admire, depend on and feel attracted to their counselor. When the counselor accepts or encourages these positive feelings in a sexual or romantic way, the process of therapy has broken down and is destructive to the client. Then the therapeutic relationship is used to meet the needs of the counselor at the expense of the client. The issues that led the client to therapy are sidetracked, postponed, even lost. The combination of trust placed in a professional helper and the vulnerability a client feels makes it difficult for clients to recognize that the situation is exploitative and victimizing.

"My counselor often said how nice it was when I could come in and give him a hug at the start of the hour. When I didn't want to do that, he made me feel inadequate somehow. Not greeting him warmly was then a problem we should 'work on.' I learned to put aside the questions that were really bothering me."

There are a few victims of sexual exploitation by counselors who do not appear to be having any special problems. Some feel that it was not all right but they have handled the situation. There are others who find that they are having difficulty coping with the experience. Many did not get help for the issues that led them to therapy in the first place. Still others want to make sure that the counselor will not be able to sexually exploit anyone in therapy again.

It is the purpose of this handbook to define sexual exploitation by counselors, to describe options available to victims of sexual exploitation in Minnesota and to present methods of choosing counselors who are not exploitative. This handbook is geared toward persons who have been sexually exploited as adults. When children are victims of sexual exploitation, some of the laws and other options covered here apply and additional resources are also available. For more information on child sexual abuse, contact a rape crisis center in your area or your county's child protection services.

DEFINITIONS OF SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

BY COUNSELORS

The terms used to discuss the issue of sexual exploitation by counselors are often ambiguous. In order to eliminate confusion, we will use these definitions:

Counselor—any psychiatrist, psychologist, nurse, psychotherapist, therapist, social worker, chemical dependency counselor, member of the clergy or other person, whether licensed or not, who provides or claims to provide psychotherapy, counseling, assessment or mental health treatment.

Client—any person who uses the services of a counselor.

Sexual exploitation—inappropriate sexual conversation, dating or suggestions of sexual involvement by the counselor, and/or any sexual or romantic contact between client and counselor which may include but is not limited to sexual intercourse, kissing, and/or touching breasts or genitals.

Boundary—something that indicates or marks a limit. In a counseling relationship, a boundary is the limit that exists to keep the relationship professional in order to ensure that clients are getting their needs met. When boundaries are violated, people feel intruded upon and perhaps even confused about their own sense of self.

"I learned that certain behaviors pleased my therapist (hugs, questions about his life) and I wanted to make him happy, so I kept quiet about subjects he didn't want to hear about."

WARNING SIGNS

In evaluating the counseling experience, before there are any blatant inappropriate suggestions, there may be some clues to lack of professionalism or misuse of power such as:

- the counselor avoiding or refusing to give information about credentials, licensing or experience;
- the client having a feeling that something is wrong during therapy, despite attempts to clarify or discuss this with the counselor;
- the client having the feeling that therapy is giving in personally to the counselor, rather than engaging in a learning process; and
- the counselor suggesting any mutual activity that is uncomfortable.

In many cases, sexual contact is preceded by actions which may be inappropriate or unprofessional, such as:

Behavior which may feel sexual:

- telling dirty jokes;
- undressing during therapy;
- ogling (eyeing up and down); or
- discussing the therapist's sex life.

Giving client "special" status by:

- scheduling after hours appointments or changing fees (when different from normal office procedure);
- making out-of-the-office appointments (when not normal office procedure);
- using the client as a confidant or for personal support;
- giving or accepting major gifts;
- inviting client to social engagements;
- borrowing money or getting involved in business deals with client;
- making secrecy a part of the counseling relationship; or
- using or offering alcohol or drugs during counseling.

If you are concerned about what you are experiencing in counseling, **trust yourself.** Ask questions of the counselor. If you ever feel intimidated or threatened by your counselor, this may be a warning sign. If your questions or concerns are not answered, talk to the counselor's supervisor, a trusted friend or a crisis line.

"It was hard to question his behavior (hugging, kissing, petting) when he always preceded it by saying what a good person I was, so loving and caring. I wanted to hear these words, and refusing that touch and those compliments would not be 'loving and caring.'"

IF IT IS YOU

If you have been a victim of sexual exploitation by a counselor, facing the experience may be one of the most difficult things you will ever do. You may be experiencing many feelings—hurt, betrayal, anger—or you may be feeling nothing, a sort of numbness. You are probably feeling confusion and ambivalence about the experience. All of this is normal. Acknowledging what has happened is a big step.

It is also normal to feel overwhelmed about the idea of "doing something" about being exploited by your counselor. Remember, you have control in this even if you're not feeling very much in control. Getting started usually involves these steps:

Gaining awareness—of what happened, of being able to name the experience, of your feelings, of how this is affecting others.

Exploring options—defining your personal goal, determining what kind of help is needed.

Initiating action—deciding what the right action is for reaching your goal and when to start.

Getting continuing support—staying connected to support people, preparing for a long wait or possible disappointment with the outcome.

"The years that I was in therapy with the person who exploited me are all a blank. I can't remember any of our conversations or what we worked on. I do remember constantly wondering whether he was going to be sexual with me this time. I felt powerless to stop him and was very confused by my own feelings of attraction and guilt, fear and shame."

In going through the healing process, these confusing and often painful feelings may occur at different times:

Reliving the experience—shame, betrayal, pleasure.

Loyalty to the counselor—ambivalence about reporting, guilt over any trouble the counselor might get into.

Fear—of being discounted, of retaliation by the counselor, of public exposure, of how family and friends might react.

Distrust—of your own feelings, of anyone trying to help.

Loss—grief over the end of the relationship.

Relief—in sharing your experience and finding an end to the isolation.

Resolution—a feeling of regaining a sense of personal power and control, understanding.

Anger—at yourself, at the counselor.

Self-blame—feeling that somehow this was all your own fault.

Confusion—about what to do or who to tell.

It helps to be extra kind to yourself, to trust your own sense of timing and to be patient and open-minded about the outcome of any action you might take.

“He used to say that I was very special and our relationship was unique. When I found out that there had been other clients that he had ‘loved,’ I felt humiliated and used.”

QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKING YOURSELF

As you begin to look at what has happened and what you would like to do, questions will arise.

Question	Answer
<i>Why was I attracted to my counselor? Is it normal?</i>	It is normal to feel respect, liking and attraction for a counselor. It is always the counselor's responsibility to set and keep limits.
<i>Am I a victim?</i>	For a counselor to have sex with his or her client is against the law. You are a victim of a crime.
<i>Why are my feelings so mixed?</i>	As in any situation where there is confusion, mixed feelings are normal.
<i>Who should I tell? Do I have to do anything about it? When?</i>	You are in control of the decision of who to tell or when to tell anyone. If you are looking at legal options, there are some time limitations on action.
<i>How is this affecting the other people in my life?</i>	They may be feeling some of the same things you are — confusion, possibly anger or blaming, uncertainty as to where they fit in.
<i>Am I looking at my feelings or am I thinking about the counselor's feelings? Is this harmful? How?</i>	If you have been in an abusive relationship with a counselor, you may have been taking care of the counselor's feelings a lot. Now is the time to think about your needs.

After sorting out your initial feelings about what has happened, you may have some different questions.

Question

Answer

How do I figure out what to do?

Read this booklet. Talk to someone you trust. Call a crisis line. No one choice is better than another.

Expect to feel confusion, anxiety and uncertainty about your goals.

You may change your mind several times. Look at all your options and see what most closely fits your goal. What seems most healing for you?

You don't have to do anything right now.

How do I know that I am doing the right thing?

Ask yourself—what is your biggest fear? It could be that you are worried about protecting the counselor, you don't want to give up that special relationship, you fear retaliation or public exposure or you just aren't ready. You may need some time to get a perspective on this.

What if I don't want to do anything specific?

Some people find they don't need to take action, but most are helped by sharing the experience with a trusted person.

When you have considered all your options, made some decisions and begun to take action:

Question

Answer

How do I feel now that I am doing something? Why are my feelings still mixed?

You can expect to feel another mixture of contrasting feelings—loss and grief over the end of the relationship, relief that reliving the experience is coming to an end, regaining personal power or possible disappointment that your specific goal was not reached.

How can I ever trust a counselor again?

A good counselor won't expect you to trust right away. Trust your own sense of timing.

Can I guarantee that my goal will be reached? What if the outcome is not what I want?

No guarantees. Even though there may be disappointment, there is always the gain of reducing your isolation, sharing the experience and being believed.

Regardless of the outcome, you may gain a sense of control and power that you didn't feel before.

“Almost every session started with his saying that I was safe there, that nothing bad could ever happen when I was with him. It felt good, but it kept me dependent and taught me nothing about being responsible for myself.”

COUNSELORS WHO SEXUALLY EXPLOIT CLIENTS

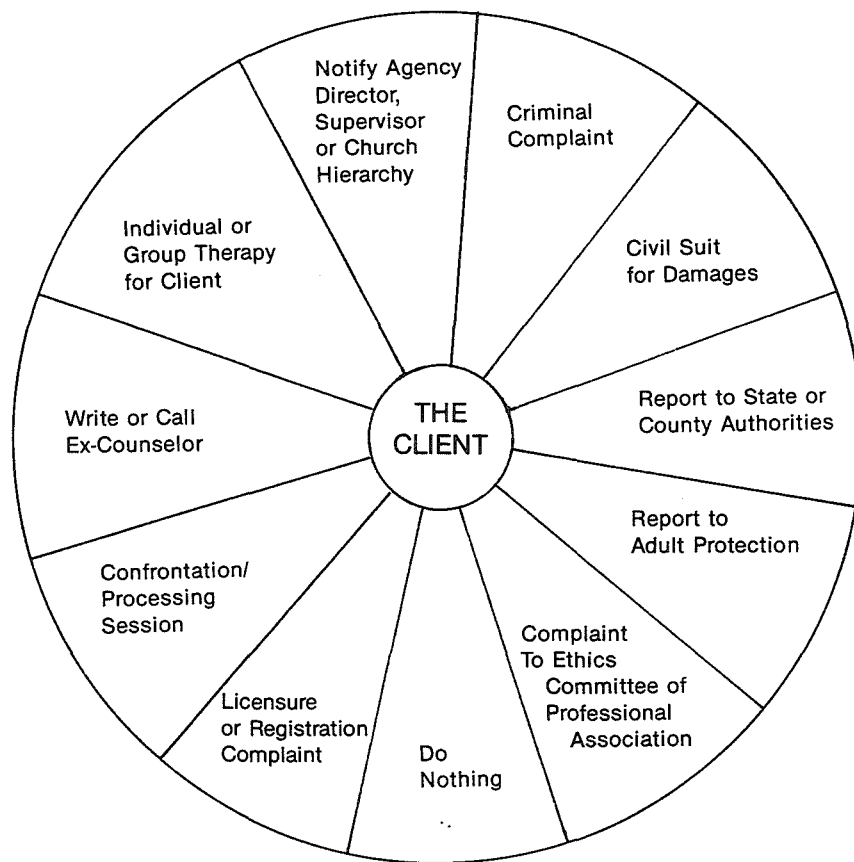
Among the questions you may ask yourself are: Why did this happen to me? Why did my counselor do that? What is wrong with me that I let this happen? What is wrong with my counselor?

Sexual exploitation is not as rare as you might think. In one self-report study, as many as 17 percent of responding counselors admitted to sexual contact with clients. Eighty percent of those counselors were sexual with several clients.

Research on what kind of counselor sexually exploits a client is new with many questions still unanswered. Some counselors sexually exploit their clients because they are having trouble in their own personal lives, and exploitation is a way for them to feel loved and to get their needs met. Some lack knowledge of professional standards and ethics, receive inadequate training and have little supervision. Despite ample evidence to the contrary, some counselors claim that sexual contact is therapeutic for the client. Some are very seriously disturbed individuals who focus only on their own sense of power. Some are people who use people, not caring who they hurt.

The most important thing for you to remember is no matter how troubled a counselor's life may be, it is the counselor's responsibility to keep sexual exploitation from happening. No matter what was said or done during the counseling relationship, **sexual exploitation is never the client's fault.**

WHEEL OF OPTIONS



Adapted from Walk-In Counseling Center
2421 Chicago Avenue South
Minneapolis, Minnesota 55404

"If I talk about this abuse, no one will believe me. Even if they believe me, they will never understand why I let this happen. Maybe they won't think it's any big deal...maybe they'll just think I was asking for it. Who's going to support the client instead of the therapist?"

CONSIDER THE OPTIONS

You have options in what action you can take, and you have choice in how much you may want to do. No one option is better than another. You may choose one or a combination of several. You may choose to do nothing. Most people find it helpful, however, to share the experience with a trusted friend.

Ask yourself what you would most like to achieve through taking action. You may want to regain a sense of control over your life and to communicate that the sexual exploitation was not okay. You may be concerned that the counselor who exploited you will hurt other clients and you want to take away that chance. You may be seeking compensation for the damage done—the money that you paid to the counselor or money for future therapy. Whatever your goal, consider what option (or options) will best suit the goal and let you put your life back in order.

Take some time to review the Wheel of Options on the opposite page. The choices are explained more fully on the pages following. Just considering the choices may make you feel uncertain and confused. Be patient with yourself.

Notify agency director, supervisor, or church hierarchy: If your counselor works in an agency, clinic, hospital or church, there is a person who is responsible for the overall operation or who directly supervises your counselor. A complaint may be made directly to that person. An advantage to this option is that it can bring fast action and may result in any number of consequences for the offending counselor. A disadvantage is the possibility of not being believed by the supervisor or finding the supervisor unwilling to take action.

Criminal complaint: Sexual exploitation by counselors is covered under the Minnesota Criminal Sexual Conduct Code (our sexual assault law). It clearly makes it a criminal offense for counselors to engage in sexual activity with clients. If found guilty, the offender may be sentenced to prison and/or required to pay a fine to the state. It makes no difference if the client consented to any of the sexual conduct; the therapist is responsible.

Two types of sexual activity are defined. Sexual penetration is any type of intrusion into the body of the victim—sexual intercourse, oral sex, anal sex or penetration with an object. Sexual contact is: 1) touching by the offender of the victim's intimate parts (breasts, groin, genitals, buttocks); 2) forcing the victim to touch the offender's intimate parts; and 3) in both circumstances, touching of the clothing covering the immediate area of the intimate parts.

The criminal law covers when there is a counselor/client relationship and the sexual act occurred during a therapy session; when there is a current or former counselor-client relationship and the client or former client is emotionally dependent on the counselor; or when there is a current or former counselor-client relationship and the sexual act occurred by means of therapeutic deception (meaning that the counselor acted as if it was a part of the client's treatment).

In prosecuting these cases, evidence of the victim's personal or medical history is not admissible unless the court finds, at a pretrial hearing, that it is relevant. The judge must specify what information will be allowed into the courtroom.

An advantage to this option is that it takes some of the responsibility off of the victim of sexual exploitation. It is considered a crime against the state. What needs to be proven is only that the activity took place, not how much damage was done. Prosecutors from a county attorney's office are responsible for the case. No money comes from the victim's pocket. Also, in some county attorney's offices, there are legal advocates who help support the victim throughout the procedure.

One disadvantage is that it is up to the county attorney's office whether to prosecute a case that has been reported and investigated. The case can be turned down for any number of reasons that may be out of the immediate control of the victim of sexual exploitation. It may also feel like a very impersonal system and may take time to get to court.

This law is in effect for crimes committed on or after August 1, 1985. The statute of limitations (the maximum time period after the crime in which charges may be filed) is three years.

Civil suit for damages: This law states that any victim of sexual exploitation may sue the abusing counselor and/or the counselor's employer. A client may sue a therapist who has participated in any form of sexual intercourse or contact to the breasts or genitals or who has requested such activity with the client. It does not matter who initiated the activity or if the client consented or actively participated. The law applies to the entire time that the individual was a client. It does not matter whether the exploitation occurred inside or outside of the office or during or outside of a regularly scheduled appointment.

During the two years following termination of therapy, the law still applies if the former client has been deceived by the counselor or is still emotionally dependent on the counselor.

The injured client may also sue the employer of the counselor for damages if: 1) the employer failed to take action when they knew or had reason to know that the counselor was engaging in sexual activity with any client; 2) during the hiring process the employer failed to ask previous employers of the counselor about his or her past sexual conduct with clients; or 3) the employer failed to pass on such information to subsequent employers who asked for it.

The law took effect on August 1, 1986, and applies to activity that took place after that date. The statute of limitations is five years.

An advantage of this option is the possibility of monetary compensation for the damage done. Depending on whether it is the counselor or the employer (or both) being sued, it also forces them to take some responsibility for the exploitation.

One disadvantage is that, because it is a civil procedure, the victim of sexual exploitation must hire the attorney. Some attorneys will take cases like this on a contingency basis (meaning that if the case is won, the attorney will simply take a percentage of the money); many will not. It may also take a long time for resolution to take place within the court system. Once the suit is filed, you need to be aware of the possibility of some public exposure that may occur. If you are thinking about a civil suit, get legal advice before taking advantage of any of the other options.

Report to state or county authorities: Many mental health clinics are licensed by the state or county. This includes outpatient mental health clinics, residential treatment facilities and licensed chemical dependency programs. If you were receiving services from a counselor who works in a licensed facility, a complaint could affect future

licensing, operation and/or funding for the agency. An advantage of this option is that it makes the agency responsible for the activity of its employees. A disadvantage is that it gives the victim of sexual exploitation little control in terms of timing and outcome.

Where to file complaints to state or county approved or licensed agencies:

Rule 29 Approved Mental Health Centers/Clinics

Rule 35 Licensed CD Residential Facilities

Rule 36 Licensed Residential Mental Treatment Centers

Rule 43 Licensed Outpatient CD Treatment Centers

Division of Licensing

State of Minnesota, Department of Human Services

444 Lafayette Road

St. Paul, Minnesota 55155-3842

(612) 296-3971

Where to get help in making complaints against licensed facilities:

Any person receiving care for chemical dependency, mental illness, or mental retardation in a facility that is licensed by the Minnesota Department of Human Services or in an acute care hospital setting may obtain help in working through these systems from:

The Office of the Ombudsman for Mental Health
and Mental Retardation

Suite 278 Metro Square Building

7th and Robert Streets

St. Paul, Minnesota 55101

(612) 296-3848 or

1-800-652-9747 (ask for the Office of the Ombudsman for Mental
Health and Mental Retardation)

To receive help in making complaints against nursing homes, hospitals, home health care agencies, and other health care facilities licensed by the Minnesota Department of Health, contact:

The Office of Health Facility Complaints

Room 235

717 Delaware Street Southeast

Minneapolis, Minnesota 55440

(612) 623-5562 (Collect calls accepted)

Report to adult protection: The policy of the state is to protect adults who, because of physical or mental disability or dependency on institutional services, are particularly vulnerable to abuse or neglect and to provide safe environments for them. Therefore, if someone is receiving certain types of services, he/she may be classified as a "vulnerable adult." This means any person over 18 who:

- is a resident or inpatient of a facility;
- receives services at or from a facility required to be licensed;
- receives services from certain types of home health care agencies; or
- is unable or unlikely to report abuse or neglect without assistance because of impairment of mental or physical function or emotional status.

Within each county, there is an adult protection service that is charged with investigation of reports and providing protective and counseling services in appropriate cases. An advantage of this option is that these people have experience in investigation of complaints. It may be a disadvantage to be classified as a "vulnerable adult."

Individual or group therapy for client: Often, for clients who have been sexually exploited by their counselors, the original problem or concern that brought them into therapy was never resolved. It may also be necessary to be able to find a supportive atmosphere in which to process the experience of sexual exploitation. Counseling with an ethical professional can be useful in resolving both the exploitation and the original issue. This can be done either in individual or group therapy.

There are currently several groups which are set up specifically for people who have been sexually exploited by their counselors. These can be an invaluable source of support and healing.

Complaint to a professional association: Many counselors belong to a professional association, all of which have ethical guidelines. Within those guidelines, sexual contact between counselors and clients is clearly unethical. You may make a formal complaint to the ethics committee of a professional association. The contact person and filing process are different for each professional association. After an investigation is conducted, if the allegation is found to be true, the counselor can be removed from membership.

An advantage to this option is that it alerts the counselor's peers to what is occurring. Professionals have an investment in keeping their profession as "clean" as possible. A disadvantage is that because membership in a professional association is not required of counselors, counselors may continue working without restriction, even if they have been excluded from the association.

Where to file complaints to professional organizations:

For chemical dependency counselors

Institute for Chemical Dependency Professionals
of Minnesota, Inc.
596 Osceola Avenue South
St. Paul, Minnesota 55102
(612) 227-7584

For social workers

National Association of Social Workers, Minnesota Chapter
614 Portland Avenue
St. Paul, Minnesota 55102
(612) 293-1935

For psychologists

Minnesota Psychological Association Ethics Committee
475 Rice Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55103
(612) 293-1873

There are also organizations for other professions. One way to locate them is to consult the licensing or registration board for that occupation (see page 26).

Write or call ex-counselor: You may choose to confront your counselor alone by writing a letter or calling. This would give you the opportunity to let the counselor know that what happened was not okay and to express your feelings. The advantage to this is that it is quick and private. One disadvantage is that it may alert your counselor to other actions you may take (such as a complaint to a supervisor) and give the counselor time to plan a response. Also, you may not get the response you want, whether it is an apology or even an acknowledgment of what occurred. This may leave you feeling isolated and unsafe.

Confrontation/processing session: This option gives the victim of sexual exploitation the opportunity to directly tell the counselor that the sexual exploitation was not okay and what the effects were. Ideally, confrontation should be done with a third party whose role it is to help and support the victim through the session. Sometimes, the counselor's supervisor will also be included. Prior to an actual confrontation, the client and the support person would discuss what the client might gain from the confrontation and how the session will be structured. The advocate is also there if difficulties should arise and to process the session with the client afterwards.

An advantage to this option is that it gives you the opportunity to tell the counselor, in a controlled situation, how you feel. This can provide a great feeling of relief and empowerment. A disadvantage is that expectations may not be met, resulting in disappointment. Another possible disadvantage is the danger in confronting the offending counselor alone; have a support person there.

Licensure or registration complaint: When a professional is licensed, a complaint to the proper licensing body can result in loss of the right to practice within the state. Currently, there are licensing boards for psychiatrists (and other physicians), nurses, and psychologists. The 1987 legislature established three new licensing boards which will be housed under a new Office of Social Work and Mental Health Boards. Social workers and marriage and family counselors will be licensed under this. Anyone who practices counseling who does not fit in one of these groups will be registered with the Board of Unlicensed Mental Health Service Providers and will be held accountable for a basic code of ethics. The purpose of this board is to collect information about those who practice counseling in Minnesota. In 1991 this board will end and the legislature will decide how to regulate these counselors.

An advantage of a licensure complaint is the possibility of either loss of license or at least much closer supervision of the offending practitioner. It also alerts the counselor's peers and employer. A disadvantage is that the sanctions imposed on the counselor may not be as strong as you would like. The hearing procedure may also feel very intimidating.

Where to file complaints to state licensing and registration boards:

For psychiatrists and other physicians

State Board of Medical Examiners
2700 University Avenue West, Suite 106
St. Paul, Minnesota 55114
(612) 642-0538

For nurses

Minnesota Board of Nursing
2700 University Avenue West, Suite 108
St. Paul, Minnesota 55114
(612) 642-0567

For psychologists

Board of Psychology
2700 University Avenue West, Suite 101
St. Paul, Minnesota 55114
(612) 642-0587

Recent legislation has established three new boards which were just beginning to meet at the time of this booklet's printing. All three will be housed at the Office of Social Work and Mental Health Boards.

For marriage and family counselors

Board of Marriage & Family Therapy

For social workers

Board of Social Work

For all other counselors

Board of Unlicensed Mental Health Service Providers

To reach these three new boards, call (612) 649-5490.

Do nothing: Some people feel that they don't want or aren't able to take any specific action. Reading this book is a first step. It is all right for you to choose to do nothing more about the experience right now. You also have a right to change your mind and take action later.

"I thought I would have to do all of this alone. I was so relieved when I found out there was someone willing to help me."

YOU DON'T HAVE TO DO THIS ALONE

Choosing what action to take, if any, can feel overwhelming. You don't have to take action alone. There are people in the helping professions who can serve as advocates during the process. Advocacy means assisting you in whatever action you choose to take. An advocate will help you to assess what your immediate needs are, help you with crisis intervention when needed, have current information on what options are available in your particular case, and be a resource and support system as you begin to take action. For information on obtaining an advocate, contact your local sexual assault center.

No matter what option is chosen, complaint procedures are complicated and can be very intimidating for clients. Sometimes advocates can make the initial contacts. This would not be done without the client's permission. This can be a way to initiate an investigation and may provide some reassurance that, if an actual complaint is filed, the systems may work. Working with an advocate also provides practice in telling the story or writing the complaint. The advocate's role is to see that your story is heard when and how you choose to tell it.

“I am working hard on repairing the damage this exploitation did to my marriage. My husband has been very depressed and angered by what happened, and he doesn’t trust any kind of therapy now.”

FOR CONCERNED PERSONS

How you may feel

As family members or significant people in the life of someone who has experienced sexual exploitation by a counselor, you are concerned persons. You may feel the crisis in ways that are similar to the victim or in ways that are unique. You will be dealing with your loved one’s feelings and your own feelings.

You may be feeling angry and betrayed. You may be feeling jealous and threatened. When you first find out about the sexual exploitation, it may feel like it was an affair. That reaction is common; however, it was not an affair. When counselors get involved sexually with their clients, they are meeting their own needs at the expense of the client. Remember that sexual exploitation by a counselor involves an abuse of power, that it is the counselor’s responsibility (not the client’s) when exploitation occurs, and that many professionals have found sexual exploitation by counselors to be a serious enough problem to create laws against it.

You may be feeling guilty that you did not see what was happening or that you felt something was wrong and you did not know what to do. Remember that exploitation occurs within an atmosphere of secrecy at a time when the client is highly vulnerable and seeking help. The counselor was responsible for setting the boundaries and did not do it.

Another difficult issue is feeling a loss of intimacy with your loved one. It may help to realize that you are both struggling with that and intimacy can be regained in time. If your loved one reacts by withdrawing from you, remember it is about the exploitation, not about you.

You may be feeling helpless; that nothing you can do will erase the experience. You cannot change history. What you can do is support your loved one in the decisions that must be faced.

Sometimes with feelings of helplessness comes a need to control the person or the decisions. One of the feelings victims often have is a loss of control over their own lives. For you to act pushy or coercive does not allow the victim to regain the feeling of being in control. Your loved one needs to take the lead in recovery. The decisions that you might make for them may not fit for their healing.

If a complaint is being made, frustration with the systems is a common feeling. While the systems were not set up to re-victimize anyone, they may feel impersonal and blaming. It also may take a long time for the systems to do their work.

Knowing what to do

Accept the experience the way it happened without blaming yourself or your loved one. Second-guessing their behavior will only increase the pain and block healing. While it is helpful to know that sexual exploitation by counselors has occurred to others, avoid comparisons. Each victim and each situation is unique as are your reactions to what occurred.

Support your loved one in the choices that need to be made. You have read about many of the options available in this booklet. You may want the victim to take action in stopping the offender's behavior or letting the secret out, but what is more helpful is to let the victim make decisions that will best aid healing. Victims should only have to be responsible for their own healing, not for the healing of their loved ones or for stopping the offender from hurting others.

Be ready to listen when and if they want to talk to you about the sexual exploitation. Details may never be discussed; they are not needed. Try to respond in a non-judgmental way, keeping in mind that the victim's trust in others has been eroded and it may take some time to trust anyone again.

Seek outside help yourself. Determine who you can talk to and receive support from. A trusted friend or a concerned professional can be helpful as you sort out your feelings and responses. It is too great a burden to face all of this by yourself.

"It has taken me five years to get to a point where I am no longer preoccupied by what happened to me in therapy. Maybe I can start to work on what brought me here in the first place, but it seems harder and more complicated now. I hope I can trust this counselor."

CHOOSING A COUNSELOR

Through counseling you may learn new ways to cope with and to have a greater enjoyment of life. It's important to remember that you are an active participant in the whole process of counseling. This means trusting yourself and your feelings as you begin to choose a counselor and throughout your counseling. Before you choose a counselor, remember that you are a consumer. You are purchasing a service from a professional and you have choices about whether you want to begin such a relationship. You have many rights in the relationship including the right to contract for the services you wish and the right to end the relationship whenever you choose. You have many things to consider about the counselor, including credentials, values, personal style, standard procedures and fees. These may reflect the policy of the agency or clinic, the individual counselor, or both. You may want to consult with more than one counselor before making a choice. Often there is a charge for this consultation.

After talking with a counselor or counselors, you need to decide whether to continue with counseling and with which counselor. If you felt negatively towards a counselor, don't see him or her again. Explaining to the counselor the reasons for your decision might give you a sense of closure. If you are unsure about a counselor, you may want to talk with him or her again to clarify some points, talk about your uncertainty with a trusted friend, or to consult with another counselor before deciding. If you feel positively towards the counselor and are comfortable with the information you've gathered, go ahead with the counseling.

Questions to consider when choosing a counselor:

- What are your training, experiences, areas of specialization? Are there particular techniques you use?
- Will you discuss my treatment plan with me? What happens if we disagree about my goals?
- Are you licensed or registered by the state?
- To what professional organization do you belong?
- Do you follow a professional code of ethics? Which one?
- Have you ever had a charge of unethical conduct brought against you?
- For what length of time do you usually treat clients?
- What ongoing professional training and/or supervision do you receive? Will you be discussing my case with a supervisor?
- Do you have physical contact with clients? Under what circumstances?
- Do you think you can work with me? Why?
- Do you charge for an initial consultation? Do you charge for a phone consultation?
- How much do you charge for each counseling session? Will my insurance pay for this counseling? How long will our appointments be?
- You may want to ask questions pertaining to the counselor's values, biases or attitudes which may affect your counseling. For example: What is your attitude toward gays and lesbians? Abortion? Non-traditional living arrangements?

Questions to ask yourself after meeting a counselor:

- Did you feel respected?
- Did you feel heard, understood?
- Did you feel safe?
- Are you comfortable with the personal style of the counselor?
- Were you comfortable with the office atmosphere?
- Was the counselor direct or evasive? Were you satisfied with the answers to your questions?
- Are you comfortable with the counselor's assessment of you and suggested treatment plan?

CLIENT'S BILL OF RIGHTS

You have the right to:

- Receive respectful treatment.
- Refuse treatment or a particular intervention strategy.
- Ask questions at any time.
- Know how available the counselor is to see you or what the waiting period is.
- Have full information about fees, method of payment, insurance reimbursement.
- Choose your own lifestyle and to have that choice respected by your counselor.
- Have full information regarding the counselor's qualifications to practice, including licensure or registration, training, experience.
- Have full information regarding the counselor's areas of specialization and limitations.
- Have full information about the counselor's therapeutic orientation and any technique which is routinely used.
- Have full information regarding your diagnosis, if your counselor uses one.
- Consult as many counselors as you choose until you find someone with whom you feel you can work.
- Experience a safe setting, free from physical, sexual or emotional abuse.
- Agree to a written contract of counseling goals and treatment plan.
- Talk about any part of your counseling with anyone you choose, including another counselor.

- Ask questions about the counselor's values, background, attitudes that are relevant to your counseling and to be provided with respectful answers.
- Request that the therapist evaluate the progress of counseling.
- Have full information regarding the limits of confidentiality and with whom and under what circumstances the counselor may discuss your case.
- Have full information regarding the extent of written or taped records of your counseling sessions and whether you will have access to them.
- Terminate therapy at any time.
- Disclose only that personal information which you choose and to refuse to answer any question if you choose.
- Require the therapist to send a report regarding your therapy with your written authorization. There may be a charge for this service.
- Have access to summaries of written files about you at your request, when legally possible.

"It feels good to have talked about this experience. I don't feel so alone or ashamed anymore. I just have to keep telling myself that it wasn't my fault, that I've done what I can to resolve the situation and it is time to get on with my life. I also know that there will be reminders, flashbacks and sorrow, but I can handle these feelings."