

# Discharging clients: tricky conversation tips

No 1 tip: you need to believe therapists know best when to discharge clients

The scripts won't work or you won't use if you don't believe its ok to discharge clients in some circumstances.

## How you begin is important:

- Discuss your expectations for client attendance and behaviour
- Regularly discuss progress towards goals stated for therapy
- Make it clear you will address these issues throughout therapy as needed.
- Make it clear that you always assess suitability and client's commitment to the process and believe referring on or taking a break can be best in some circumstances

## For example:

*Gina, we discussed the phone I require all my clients to attend weekly or fortnightly in the beginning 6 months of therapy. This is to ensure the therapy has a chance to prosper and you have the opportunity to form a therapeutically helpful relationship with me. If you cannot make these time frames or regularly postpone your appointments, we will discuss whether you are ready for therapy or might be better suited to a different therapist. However, I don't recommend that because it is difficult for monthly therapy to work and I really want this to work for you.*



# Discharging clients

## When you need to discharge a client due to poor attendance

- Remind the client of your agreement around attendance
- Discuss with the client that they have not upheld their end of the agreement
- Discuss the impact on therapy and the therapy relationship
- If the client is unwilling to commit to regular attendance discuss supported discharge.
- If the client agrees to change behaviours, remind them that further breaches will result in discharge. (limit setting and playing by the rules is important for clients, it is part of the intervention we provided particularly if working from a limited reparenting model).

### For example:

*Gina, we agreed that you would attend fortnightly, but every second appointment you cancel. This means it is difficult for us to work towards the goals set in initial therapy. We discussed this two months ago and you agreed to attend more regularly rather than avoid appointments. Although it disappoints me to have to say this, because I like working with you, I have decided it's best if we end our therapy agreement and you find a therapist who is comfortable working monthly. I have a list of three names of therapists who you may like to look at and I will also let your GP know that I have provided you with these names, Your GP might also have some suggestions.*



# Discharging clients

## When you need to discharge a client due to poor fit

- Remind the client of your agreement around suitability and progress
- Discuss with the client that the therapy is not progressing as both of you had hoped
- Discuss the impact on therapy and the therapy relationship of continuing under these circumstances
- Discuss supported discharge including referral options and progress and maintenance plan related to any gains

### For example:

*Gina, although this is a tough conversation, its one I need to have with you. Over the last few months, therapy has stalled and some issues have come to light that I wasn't aware of when we began. My understanding of your needs for therapy have changed. It is important for me that you have a good experience of therapy, in which you can reach your goals. I have decided that it would be better if I referred you to a trusted colleague. I hold your best interests at heart as I do so, Although I would like to continue working with you, because I have enjoyed working with you, I can't in good conscious continue with this new understanding of your therapy needs.*



# Discharging clients

## When the client begs to continue with you

- Empathise with the client's concerns without acquiescing
- Let the client know that you understand a part of them is scared or hurting about this change
- Let them know your authentic feelings about the discussion (unless this would not be helpful)
- Stay firm in the good parent role about making a decision in the clients best interest.

## For example:

*Gina, I want to thank you for your faith in me. I have enjoyed working with you. This is difficult for us both. I can really hear a part of you pleading with me to continue, and a part of me wants to give that part what it wants. But I also know as a therapist I have to do what is in your best interests. Even if that feels painful right now.*



# Discharging clients

## If the client becomes angry:

- Centre yourself, if you need to pause say so.
- Empathise with the client, use words like a part of you is angry
- Explore what sits underneath the anger (hurt, fear, entitlement)
- Use what you know about the clients history/schemas to demonstrate care and understanding
- Stay firm in the decision to discontinue therapy. Speak slowly

## For example:

Therapist: *Gina I can hear that a part of you is upset with my decision. I can hear how angry you are. I've been a little triggered by your tone, I'm just going to take a pause. (once settled continue)*

*Tell me what bothers you most about this. What is the feeling underneath the anger? I am sorry that you feel hurt by this and I can understand that it has triggered your abandonment schema.*

Therapist: *I can see that. But I want the wise part of you to also consider if this is different than when Dad left? I remember when Dad left you had no warning, he just disappeared and I know that hurt. I am talking to you about this, I am offering you a couple of more appointments to discuss your feelings about changing therapists and I am supporting you to find another therapist.*

