

# Conflict of interest: tricky conversation tips

No 1 tip: refer to the code of ethics of the practitioners at your practice

The most common reason for conflict of interest is people who are close contacts of existing clients or known to the practitioner in a social context. Confidentiality is harder to maintain but not impossible when the client is connected to another client the practitioner sees. Have a clear script for what you communicate in this instance.

## **Confidentiality is important:**

- Highlight that the reason for the practitioner discontinuing therapy or not offering a service is a professional conflict of interest
- Mention the code of ethics if need be but do not reveal the nature of the conflict.
- Express empathy about any curiosity the client expresses
- Express regret about being unable to continue
- Offer supported referral

## **Know client example:**

*Gina, I'm calling on behalf of George. George has become aware of a professional conflict of interest that prevents him from beginning/ continuing therapy with you. As you may be aware psychologists practice under a code of ethics that guides them, and George must follow the code in this instance. I understand this may be disappointing. I want to reassure you that the practice will help you find another therapist. George has suggested therapist A and Therapist B, or alternatively, that you talk to your GP to see who they recommend.*



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When it is a personal conflict that results in the therapist being unable to continue, ( for example, the client's issue is triggering a current unresolved issue in the therapist and they feel that can't be clear about it), the therapist would generally have managed the conflict of interest issue in a session or phone call with the client. Clients can call to discuss. You are under no obligation to reveal the nature of this conflict.

## How to begin:

- Raise the issue of the conflict of interest as stated by the practitioner
- Express that the practitioner regrets around being unable to continue
- Remind of the supported referral options provided
- Empathise with clients curiosity but do not disclose the nature of the conflict
- Use the broken record if needed

## For example:

*Gina, I can hear that this news has been hard for you. However, George doesn't have the option to see you because of the conflict. He has given you some supported referral options. Shall we go through them together now? Or would you like to talk it through with your GP*

If the client asks why or tries to guess, use the broken record technique:

*I understand your desire to know, but unfortunately, the code of ethics prevents both George and I from doing so.*

*Unfortunately, I can't reveal the reason without breaching George's confidence/ boundary. I understand that's frustrating and it's only human nature to want to know.*

