

Working with children and young people within the counselling professions

**Good Practice in Action 046
Commonly Asked Questions**

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Context

This resource is one of a suite prepared by BACP to enable members to engage with BACP's *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* in respect of working with children and young people.

Using Commonly Asked Questions resources

BACP members have a contractual commitment to work in accordance with the current *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*. The Commonly Asked Questions resources are not contractually binding on members, but are intended to support practitioners by providing general information on principles and policy applicable at the time of publication, in the context of the core ethical principles, values and personal moral qualities of BACP.

Specific issues in practice will vary depending on clients, particular models of working, the context of the work and the kind of therapeutic intervention provided. As specific issues arising from work with clients are often complex, BACP always recommends discussion of practice dilemmas with a supervisor and/or consulting a suitably qualified and experienced legal or other relevant practitioner.

In this resource, the word 'therapist' is used to mean specifically counsellors and psychotherapists and 'therapy' to mean specifically counselling and psychotherapy.

The terms 'practitioner' and 'counselling related services' are used generically in a wider sense, to include the practice of counselling, psychotherapy, coaching and pastoral care.

Introduction

This resource aims to help practitioners, who are considering offering psychological therapy to children and young people, to better understand and equip themselves in this complex area. Working therapeutically with this client group is considered to be work with any person under 18 years old (*Children's Act 1989, S.105*). You may also find the Counselling MindEd e-learning modules a valuable resource for Continuing Professional Development (CPD) and specific training references, which will help practitioners to develop their skills in working with children and young people. (www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/competences-and-curricula/counselling-minded) and BACP's competence frameworks for working with children and young people (www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/competences-and-curricula), which show the skills needed in respect of this client group.

Guidelines for working online with children and young people, covering a variety of topical considerations can be found at www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/coronavirus/working-online-with-cyp-faqs.

This updated resource offers some ideas about making ethical decisions regarding this client group; the questions, answers and references are by no means exhaustive, but will hopefully encourage you to become more confident in developing excellent practice in this area of work. It touches on the changing landscape of working therapeutically with children and young people and acknowledges the increased use of online platforms and phone counselling in response to COVID-19.

An updated Online and Phone Therapy Competences Framework is planned for publication at the end of 2020. This will provide members with a robust, interim framework to support training and practice.

BACP plans to undertake an in-depth review of the evidence-base to ensure that the Online and Phone Therapy Competence Framework is underpinned by contemporary research, with a full review of the curriculum to follow.

More useful information can be found within various Good Practice resources located at www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/good-practice-in-action.

1 Differences

What are the major differences between working therapeutically with adults, and working therapeutically with children or young people?

1.1 Skills

As a practitioner, it is important for you to consider whether you have the necessary training and skills to work with this client group. The *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* commits practitioners to 'working within [their] competence' (Commitment, point 2a) and says that: 'We must be competent to deliver the services being offered to at least fundamental professional standards or better...' (Good Practice, point 13).

This could mean that you will need additional specialist training (see question 8 'What specific skills and knowledge will I need to work with children and young people?'). This could also mean that you need additional supervision with a supervisor who has '...adequate levels of expertise ...' (Good Practice, point 62) and that you may need to consult others to ensure the work you are undertaking meets professional standards. (Good Practice, point 13) goes on to remind us that when '...consulting others with relevant expertise, seeking second opinions, or making referrals, we will do so in ways that meet our commitments and obligations for client confidentiality and data protection'.

BACP's competence frameworks and training curricula for children and young people may give additional guidance on skills needed along with e-learning resources, which are available at: (www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/competences-and-curricula/counselling-minded).

The law is complex in relation to children and young people and varies across the countries of the UK.

As members of BACP we are committed to demonstrating '...a sound knowledge of the law relevant to working with children and young people and their human rights' (Good Practice, point 27).

Some resources that may prove helpful in respect of the law are Good Practice in Action legal resources:

GPiA 002: *Counselling children and young people in school contexts in England, Northern Ireland and Wales*

GPiA 026: *Counselling children and young people in school contexts in Scotland.*

Both of the above resources give an overview of the legal aspects of working within schools.

Also, GPiA 031: *Safeguarding children and young people in England, Northern Ireland and Wales*, GPiA 052: *Child Protection Scotland* and 053: *Children's Hearings Scotland* give an overview of the legal aspects of safeguarding.

These and other Good Practice in Action resources can be found at www.bacp.co.uk/gpia.

Counselling-based services or agencies supporting this client group will usually have their own policies and referral processes, and practitioners will need to agree with the school, organisation and the agency what records are kept, where they are kept, and who has access to them. See the *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* where members are committed to work to professional standards by: 'keeping accurate and appropriate records' (Commitment, point 2e) and 'protecting client confidentiality and privacy' (Commitment, point 3b). Practitioners, and services or agencies working with children and young people, will also need to consider carefully their legal responsibilities in respect of data protection when they are working with children and young people.

More detailed information about this can be found both on the Information Commissioner's (ICO) website at: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/children-and-the-gdpr/what-should-our-general-approach-to-processing-childrens-personal-data-be> and also within Good Practice in Action 105 Legal Resource: *The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) legal principles and practice notes for the counselling professions*.

1.2 Referral process

One of the major differences between working therapeutically with adults, and working therapeutically with children or young people, is the referral process. Children, and often young people, tend to be referred by others rather than by themselves. Therefore, practitioners need to make clear to referrers the importance of explaining to the child or young person why they are being referred. The referrer should attempt to gain their agreement, and also ensure that the child or young person wants to attend and understands what it is that they are attending.

This respects the young person's right to autonomy (see the *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions*, Ethics, point 5). If this is not handled with care it can influence the work of the practitioner with the child or young person, as they may not wish to be there or understand why they have been referred for therapy.

The referral will also often be from another person's perspective, i.e. a parent or school worker. If parents or another agency are paying you as a private practitioner, this can potentially influence the therapeutic work with the child or young person (client). For example, imagine receiving a private referral where a parent outlines a young person's 'problematic behaviour' and 'difficulties relating to a step-parent'. Careful explanation needs to be given at the beginning of the contract between the practitioner and the referrer, and also the contract between the practitioner and the child or young person; the young person may not consider that their behaviour is problematic, they may want to talk about other aspects of their life, or may not want to be attending the session at all, and to make matters more complex, it is often the parent that pays for the therapy.

BACP's *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* commits members to the ethical principle of respect stating:

We will do all that we reasonably can to ensure that our clients are participating on a voluntary basis. Hesitant clients or clients who feel under pressure from other people or agencies to work with us will have their reservations acknowledged and taken into account in how services are offered. (Good Practice, point 25.)

Again, practitioners, agencies and services will need to operate in compliance with the current data protection legislation in respect of consent (see 1.1 above). Further information about referrals is also included within point 2 of this resource.

1.3 Other agency involvement

Another difference is that often other agencies are involved with the child or young person. This could be a service provider, school, carer, or parent. The *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* clearly commits members to putting clients first by 'making clients our primary concern while we are working with them' (Commitment, point 1a). Practitioners therefore need to make clear to the young client and parents/carers and/or agencies involved, that the needs and confidentiality of the client will be protected unless the client is in danger of harm, or there is another statutory duty, or organisational policy, to report. Further details on confidentiality are included within the response to question 4.

1.4 Legal implications of working with children and young people

The *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* commits members to professional standards by: 'keeping up to date with the law, regulations and any other requirements, including guidance from this Association, relevant to our work' (Good Practice, point 14f). The law in relation to working therapeutically with children and young people differs substantially from that of working therapeutically with adults. It is important therefore that practitioners keep their knowledge updated. BACP has developed a number of legal resources to help practitioners and counselling service providers.

These can be found at: www.bacp.co.uk/gpia.

A good working knowledge of safeguarding procedures is essential for all practitioners working therapeutically with children and young people. (See GPiA 031 Legal Resource: *Safeguarding children and young people in England and Wales*, and GPiA 052 Legal Resource: *Child Protection in Scotland*, and 053: *Children's Hearings in Scotland*.)

It is important that practitioners working with young people under 18 check to see whether they are required by law to hold a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate (Protecting Vulnerable Groups (PVG) in Scotland). Further information can be found at www.gov.uk/disclosure-barring-service-check/arranging-checks-as-an-employer (England and Wales) <https://www.mygov.scot/pvg-scheme/> (Scotland); www.nidirect.gov.uk/campaigns/accessni-criminal-record-checks (Northern Ireland).

GPiA 031 Legal Resource: *Safeguarding Children and Young People in England and Wales* also gives detailed information about safeguarding and explains:

A DBS certificate search is colloquially known as a 'DBS check'. There are three levels of check available (standard; enhanced; and enhanced with list checks). Employers or contracting organisations have a responsibility to run criminal records and other necessary security checks on practitioners working with children and young people, as appropriate to the practitioner's level of contact with the vulnerable clients. Applications for a DBS check can only be made by post or online by an employer. For a full explanation of how the system works, please refer to the website www.gov.uk/disclosure-barring-service-check/arranging-checks-as-an-employer (p29).

2 Referrals

What is best practice for receiving referrals both in private practice and/or through organisations or schools?

There is a wide range of developmental difference with this client group of under-18s, and the referral processes need to be age appropriate.

(For more information about age to consent see GPiA 002 Legal Resource: *Counselling children and young people in school contexts in England, Northern Ireland and Wales*, point 2.1.)

A referral form will give information that could be helpful, including the reasons for referring, and some of the main presenting issues for the child or young person, but as mentioned above, these will be from the referrer's perspective rather than that of the child or young person.

It could also be helpful to have other details such as any agencies or professionals who are involved in supporting the young person, and details of their family composition. This could all add to the practitioner's background knowledge of the nature of the young person's presenting difficulties before the therapeutic work begins.

2.1 Referrals from young people

Young people may self-refer in the same way as adults. However, practitioners need to be aware of the legal aspects when contracting to work with them, and the fact that the law across the UK differs. BACP's GPiA 031 Legal Resource: *Safeguarding children and young people in England and Wales* states that:

Children who are under the age of 16 may also be regarded as competent to make their own decisions (often referred to as 'Gillick competence'). This principle of law was settled by the House of Lords in the leading case of Gillick v West Norfolk and Wisbech Area Health Authority and Another [1986] 1 AC 112.

The rationale of the Gillick case was that a child's ability to make an informed decision may be assessed according to a number of factors, including:

- *the nature and seriousness of the decision to be made*
- *the child's age*
- *the child's maturity*
- *the child's understanding of the circumstances*
- *the information given to the child to enable him or her to understand the potential benefits and risks of what is proposed and the consequences of consent or refusal.*

It will be evident that the capacity of a child to make a decision is situation-specific and that, to have capacity, the child must have an informed understanding of the issues, including the risks and benefits involved and the consequences of refusal (point 4.4).

There is also more information on 16 to 18-year-olds in the above publication (point 4.3) and for members working in Scotland see Legal Resources: GPiA 052 *Understanding child protection in Scotland* and 053 *Understanding the children's hearing system in Scotland*.

2.2 Parent/carer's consent

In all cases where the child or young person is not considered to have the mental capacity to consent to therapy, someone with parental responsibility for the child or young person will need to give consent. See GPiA 031 Legal Resource: *Safeguarding children and young people in England and Wales* (Section 4).

3 Therapeutic agreement or contract

How do you set up a contract with a child or young person?

As with any client the *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* commits members to build appropriate relationships with clients, stating:

We will give careful consideration to how we reach agreement with clients and will contract with them about the terms on which our services will be provided. Attention will be given to:

- a. *reaching an agreement or contract that takes account of each client's expressed needs and choices so far as possible*
- b. *communicating terms and conditions of the agreement or contract in ways easily understood by the client and appropriate to their context*
- c. *stating clearly how a client's confidentiality and privacy will be protected and any circumstances in which confidential or private information will be communicated to others*
- d. *providing the client with a record or easy access to a record of what has been agreed*
- e. *keeping a record of what has been agreed and of any changes or clarifications when they occur*
- f. *being watchful for any potential contractual incompatibilities between agreements with our clients and any other contractual agreements applicable to the work being undertaken and proactively strive to avoid these wherever possible or promptly alert the people with the power or responsibility to resolve these contradictions.*

(Good Practice, point 31)

It is important that matters regarding confidentiality, and the limits to this are fully explained in an age-appropriate way to the young client so that they understand what this means (see Good Practice in Action Legal Resources: GPiA 002 *Counselling children and young people in school contexts in England, Northern Ireland and Wales*; GPiA 026 *Counselling children and young people in school contexts in Scotland*; and GPiA 014 *Managing confidentiality*, which give further information on what these limits may be). A visual diagram is sometimes helpful (see the *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* which commits members to 'communicating clearly with clients...' (Commitment, point 4). See also GPiA 039 Commonly Asked Questions and 055 Fact Sheet *Making the contract in the counselling professions*.

When contracting, practitioners also need to agree to the practical aspects of the therapy, such as how sessions will be offered (face to face or online), how many sessions will be offered and how long they will be.

It is important that the young client knows about any limit to confidentiality, for example: although you will not talk about the content of the sessions (other than in the circumstances you have outlined), they can talk to other people if they want to.

This contracting process would usually also include discussion about what the young client hopes to achieve from their therapy sessions, and about what would happen if you were to meet them outside of the session – how they would want you to respond. This is especially important when working within schools where the practitioner may have a dual role.

It is also important that when you make an agreement with a child or young person about working together that you have a clear understanding of what your roles and responsibilities are in respect of data protection legislation (GDPR). The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has very helpful notes on what you will need to do in respect of working with children and young people and the age at which they can personally consent to you collecting sensitive data or keeping records, and the importance of explaining to the young client, the kinds of records you keep, who may have access to them, where they are stored, and how long they are kept for, and, dependent on their age, whether you will need their consent, or the consent of whoever has parental responsibility. You can find the latest information available on the ICO website at: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/applications/children> and also within GPiA 105 Legal Resource: *The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) legal principles and practice notes for the counselling professions*.

The Department for Education also has helpful guidelines for counselling in schools at: www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/counselling-service-schools#toc-0 and there are also GPiA 002 *Counselling children and young people in England, Northern Ireland and Wales* in school contexts and GPiA 026 *Counselling children and young people in school contexts in Scotland*.

Good Practice in Action resources regarding contracts can be found at www.bacp.co.uk/gpia.

4 Safeguarding and confidentiality

What do I need to be aware of regarding safeguarding and confidentiality?

4.1 Safeguarding and confidentiality

This is a very important area of knowledge, and one that requires skill and judgment on how to respond if a child discloses information about their safety or the safety of someone else that concerns you.

GPiA 031 Legal Resource: *Safeguarding children and young people in England and Wales* refers to confidentiality in Section 5, managing risk in Section 6, and dilemmas of safeguarding and confidentiality in Section 8. Section 10 provides a 'Disclosure Checklist' and gives guidance on when you may need to share or disclose information. The author points out:

Information in relation to children and young people should be shared in accordance with the principles set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children (DfE, 2015) (i.e. relevant facts, shared on a need to know basis, with the person/people who is/are in the best position to take appropriate action. (p36)

See the Department for Education website at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2 for more information.

See also GPiA 052 Legal Resource: *Child protection in Scotland* for information about child protection and safeguarding children and young people in Scotland.

4.2 Safeguarding training and policy

When working with children and young people who are vulnerable, practitioners need to be prepared, and know what they should be aware of.

This means practitioners need to know what the child protection and safeguarding policies and procedures are in the agencies and services they are working for, and they should have ongoing safeguarding training.

For further information, see: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2020/coronavirus-briefing-safeguarding-guidance-information-schools>.

This is specialised training often provided by the agency or service provider. It is also offered by training providers including local safeguarding boards, and organisations such as the NSPCC (see: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/training/our-elearning-courses> and Barnardo's (see: <https://www.barnardos.org.uk/commission-us/training>).

See also: www.gov.uk/government/publications/safeguarding-children-and-young-people/safeguarding-children-and-young-people for more information.

4.3 Supervision

The *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* reminds members that:

Supervision is essential to how practitioners sustain good practice throughout their working life. Supervision provides practitioners with regular and ongoing opportunities to reflect in depth about all aspects of their practice in order to work as effectively, safely and ethically as possible. Supervision also sustains the personal resourcefulness required to undertake the work. (Good Practice, point 60)

Supervisors require '...adequate levels of expertise...' (See Good Practice, point 62), so your supervisor should have a good working knowledge of issues pertaining to children and young people, and be able to support you to make ethical decisions about safeguarding and confidentiality.

5 Safeguarding procedures

What are the procedures when I have concerns about a child or young person's safety or the safety of others?

As discussed in question 4, if you have concerns about a child or young person's safety or the safety of others from what they disclose to you, you need to consider the facts very carefully.

The *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* commits members to put our clients first stating:

We will give careful consideration to how we manage situations when protecting clients or others from serious harm or when compliance with the law may require overriding a client's explicit wishes or breaching their confidentiality. (Good Practice, point 9)

and:

In exceptional circumstances, the need to safeguard our clients or others from serious harm may require us to override our commitment to making our client's wishes and confidentiality our primary concern... (Good Practice, point 10)

Again, it is important that practitioners working with this client group know the policy and procedures of the agency or organisation they are working for, and who to contact if there are concerns about a child or young person's safety or wellbeing. For example, schools will have a designated, named or lead person acting in a safeguarding or child protection role to whom concerns can be reported. This will be done verbally initially, but a written account of what was shared by the child or young person will need to be recorded. In this written account you need to record the facts only, about what was said or observed and how this was followed up. The school then has a duty to follow up this disclosure with any relevant agencies as appropriate, in accordance with the school's child protection policy.

5.1 Private practice

Private practitioners need to develop robust policies and procedures for what to do if they have safeguarding concerns about a child or young person. The practitioner's supervisor will be key in supporting ethical decision-making. GPiA 044 Fact Sheet: *Ethical decision making in the context of the counselling professions* offers useful information and a checklist which may also be helpful.

Private practitioners will need to pay careful attention to the *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions'* commitment to professional standards by keeping accurate records 'for the type of service being provided' and ensuring that they 'comply with the applicable data protection requirements – see www.ico.org.uk' (Good Practice, point 15) and record carefully in their notes any concerns raised and any actions taken so that they can refer back to them if needed.

In all cases, whether within an organisation or private practice, practitioners have a responsibility to ensure appropriate follow-up action takes place, and they need to continue to raise concerns if they feel the response from others has been inadequate.

6 Therapeutic boundaries

How do I hold the therapeutic boundaries when working in schools or when other service partners are involved?

This is a very important part of working with this client group as they are part of a wider system, that is, family, school and possibly other agencies which are supporting them.

Practitioners working within schools or other organisations may find themselves in conversation with other members of staff, who may want to talk about particular clients. Remain aware of the language used and the language others use.

For example, a staff member may say: *'Did John tell you his Mum and Dad have separated?'*

Think about how you would respond to this; if you say 'yes' or 'no' you are communicating something about that client's session. Answering with another question deflects this, for example: *'When did he tell you this?'* or *'How did you know this?'*

If other agencies, or adults are working with the child or young person as well, they may want to know about the therapeutic work. This needs to be engaged with on a 'need to know' basis. Rather than sharing specific points, consider talking to them about whether the client is engaging in the sessions, and the themes that are being worked with. For example, anxiety issues, the need for more communication, peer relationships, protection or conflict may have been explored in their play or sessions. The *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* includes the need for integrity as practitioners, to avoid any actions that would 'bring our profession into disrepute' (Good Practice, point 48). Therefore, we need to think carefully before speaking about young clients to ensure we hold their rights to confidentiality.

The *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* also includes an extended section on confidentiality (Good Practice, points 55 a-g). You need to familiarise yourself with this, ensuring that you are clear about how you can protect the confidentiality and privacy of your clients, which would include, actively protecting their information, informing them about how their personal data are used, who may be in the circle of confidentiality, and any foreseeable limitations there may be to their privacy, checking that the contracts you have with agencies, schools and others are compatible with what you agree with your clients.

More information can be found in GPiA 110 and 111.

7 Supervision

What kind of supervision should I seek when working therapeutically with children and young people?

As discussed in question 4 supervision is recommended 'to anyone working in roles that require regularly giving or receiving emotionally challenging communications, or engaging in relationally complex and challenging roles' (Good Practice, point 73) and is 'essential to how practitioners sustain good practice throughout their working life...' (Good Practice, point 60). It is intended to support practitioners to engage therapeutically with clients and is:

A specialised form of professional mentoring provided for practitioners responsible for undertaking challenging work with people. Supervision is provided to ensure standards; enhance quality, stimulate creativity and support the sustainability and resilience of the work being undertaken.
(EF Glossary)

It is therefore important to seek a supervisor with competence in therapeutic work with children and young people, who can support you in the way that you work. For example, if you work creatively with young clients, then a supervisor who has experience of using the arts within supervision, and who has experience of working with different aged children and young people may prove helpful and support your practice. Likewise, if your sessions have moved to online provision, working with a supervisor experienced in this method of delivery would be important.

As already discussed in question 4, support regarding safeguarding is crucial when working with this client group, so it is essential to have a qualified supervisor who has worked extensively in this field. It is important that all supervisors '... will model high levels of good practice for the work they supervise, particularly with regard to expected levels of competence and professionalism...' (Good Practice, point 63).

8 Skills and competence

What specific skills and knowledge will I need to counsel children and young people?

Children and young people competences and curricula (4-18) are available at www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/competences-and-curricula/children-and-young-people. These, together with the Counsellors' guide set out the breadth and depth of skills and knowledge required to work with this client group and is an essential starting place if you are considering working in this area.

BACP's *Counselling Children and Young People (4–18 Years) Training Curriculum* has been developed for training providers who wish to deliver counselling training for work with children and young people. The curriculum is underpinned by the evidence-based competences and so when you are looking for a training course, you might find it useful to check which areas of the curriculum the course covers. A course that covers all aspects of BACP's CYP curriculum will be a comprehensive course that incorporates all the elements of the CYP competency framework. You can download a copy of the curriculum here: www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/competences-and-curricula.

If you have undertaken a general, or adult training course, this will usually mean that you will need to do additional, specific training, in respect of children and young people before you start working with children and young people. Your supervisor should be able to assist you to know what level of competence you need to have to work with this client group, and what additional training you may need to undertake.

Skills to judge the length of the session for a child or young person are important. This will depend on the child or young person's age and their level of development or, if they have special educational needs, such as autism or dyslexia.

For example, it may be necessary to set a session time of 30 or 45 minutes rather than a full 50 minutes or hour.

As the *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* points out, we must work to professional standards by 'keep[ing] our skills and knowledge up to date' (Good Practice, point 14).

For those undertaking the transition from face-to-face therapy to providing online or telephone counselling we recommend that CYP practitioners continue to refer to our adult telephone and e-counselling competences and curricula (updated as Online and phone therapy competences, end of 2020) and undertake appropriate training, linking this with the additional social, neurodevelopmental, psychological and legal knowledge required for working with this age group. Please refer to Working online with children and young people www.bacp.co.uk/news/news-from-bacp/coronavirus/working-online-with-cyp-faqs.

The following list gives some areas of practice to be considered for continued professional development in respect of children and young people. It is not exhaustive, and is not intended to replace specific specialist training, but gives an indication of what the author has found helpful.

8.1 Child development

An in-depth knowledge of child development is essential. Often a child or young person may be developmentally below or above their chronological age, for example, their emotional or moral development. It is important for practitioners to understand how they can relate to the person at their level of understanding in all areas of development.

8.2 Attachment

This is an important area of understanding that could help practitioners to understand how their clients relate to those caring for them – friends, family and school – and also how they relate to the practitioner. Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1988) seeks to explain how we relate to others and asserts that this often stems from our relationships with our early caregivers.

It is possible that children and young people will present within the therapeutic relationship in certain ways, depending on their attachment style, and this will affect how they relate to others.

8.3 Trauma informed support

Working with children and young people who have been subjected to any kind of abuse or trauma needs careful thought. The effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and trauma are complex; practitioners need to have knowledge about both the long and short-term effects of abuse, and the range of therapeutic approaches that may be appropriate (and those recommended through research) for children and young people.

Specialist skills and knowledge are needed in respect of how trauma impacts on a child or young person. There are a number of organisations offering specific training in this field.

Practitioners will also need to identify when and know how, to make onward referral to specialist, trauma informed, mental health support.

8.4 The importance of the arts and play

Often children cannot find words to describe their distress, and play is the child's natural medium to communicate and learn. The arts provide a way of expression, which is non-verbal, and can prove to be a powerful therapeutic tool. Sue Pattison, Maggie Robson and Ann Beynon (2015 second edition due for publication autumn 2018) make the point that:

Whilst there is a spectrum of approaches in current play therapy practice within the UK, all share the understanding that play is the natural, instinctive means through which all children learn, communicate and explore their worlds and gain a sense of identity...

They go on to say:

The symbolic distance of play enables children to express their feelings, thoughts and beliefs surrounding difficult life experiences (p98).

For more information about play, see PTUK at: www.playtherapy.org.uk, the The British Association of Play Therapists at: www.bapt.info. The British Association of Art Therapists also offers some training opportunities, see www.baat.org.

8.5 Training and support

BACP has been a partner in the development of an e-learning resource, funded by the Department of Health, called *MindEd*.

Within this, *Counselling MindEd* offers a free, high quality, interactive e-learning resource for practitioners working therapeutically with children, young people and young adults to receive ongoing skills training and development, which although not providing specialist training for working in this field, it does offer good Continued Professional Development. See www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/competences-and-curricula/counselling-minded.

9 Records

What records do I need to keep when counselling children or young people?

You need to have either the young person's or the adult with parental responsibilities' permission for you to keep records that contain any personal identifying information, and you will need to explain why you are keeping the records, the purpose of them, how long you will keep them and who may be in the circle of confidentiality in respect of sharing these records. See the Information Commissioner's Office website for more information at: <https://ico.org.uk/for-organisations/guide-to-the-general-data-protection-regulation-gdpr/applications/children>.

What sort of records you will need to keep, and where they are stored, will depend on the context and place of work. For example, schools in England, which employ practitioners, may require that they keep a brief record of when they meet with clients, and the themes covered in their sessions, which are then stored within the school as part of the child or young person's educational record. Other service providers of therapeutic work with children and young people may require records to be held differently. Private practitioners will need to develop their own systems, bearing in mind that BACP's *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* commits members to working to professional standards stating: 'We will keep accurate records that: are adequate, relevant and limited to what is necessary for the type of service being provided' and 'comply with the applicable data protection requirements.' (Good Practice, point 15.) Further resources in respect of record keeping, and data protection are:

GPiA 065 Clinical Reflections for Practice: *Confidentiality and record keeping*

GPiA 066 Commonly Asked Questions: *What do we mean by records and record keeping?*

GPiA 067 Commonly Asked Questions: *Practical aspects of record keeping*

GPiA 068 Fact Sheet: *Organisational aspects of record keeping*

GPiA 069 Legal Resource: *Sharing records with clients and other professionals*

GPiA 071 Legal Resource: *Ownership and storage of records.*

It is important to remember that the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and data protection law apply to the work of counselling professionals. The law in this area is complicated and still developing. However, the Information Commissioner's website has up-to-date information and guidance (see <https://ico.org.uk>). As practice issues can be complex, we recommend consulting your supervisor, and, wherever necessary, a qualified practitioner or lawyer. Some professional insurers provide legal advice as part of their service. As well as keeping up with legal changes (Good Practice, point 46) it is important to keep up to date with any changes in organisational and agency practice and policies that may affect your work.

GPiA 105 Legal Resource: *The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) legal principles and practice notes for the counselling professions* has detailed information.

9.1 How long do I need to keep their records?

Although the *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* commits members to maintain professional standards and states that members 'will keep accurate records that are adequate, relevant and limited to the service being provided' (Good Practice, point 15), length of retention of records is difficult to stipulate. As Tim Bond points out in *Standards and Ethics for Counselling in Action* (2015) in respect of the question 'how long should records be kept?':

This is a difficult question to answer. Records may be relevant to present or future court proceedings or to complaints, and so the time limits for legal proceedings and complaints procedures may be relevant (p25).

The practitioner working with children and young people will need to consider the organisational context and requirements of where they are working together with what is appropriate for the service they offer – for example schools or Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) may have specific policies on record retention, whereas a practitioner in private practice may not. For further information see Good Practice in Action resources at www.bacp.co.uk/gpia and *Standards and Ethics for Counselling in Action* (Bond, 2015) and *Confidentiality and Record Keeping in Counselling and Psychotherapy* (Bond and Mitchels, 2015).

10 Therapeutic model

What orientation of counselling can specifically help support children and young people?

A scoping report written for MindEd (Griffiths, 2013) considering helpful and unhelpful factors in school-based counselling from the clients' perspectives found:

The most helpful aspect of counselling for young people was found to be the opportunity to talk and be listened to.

Other helpful factors reported by young people included getting things off their chest; problem-solving; guidance (suggestion and advice); insight; confidentiality; independence of counsellor; being understood; being accepted; and personal qualities of the counsellor (p3).

There are many different therapeutic approaches that may be helpful in work with children and young people, including the use of online therapy or play therapy (though online play therapy is not recommended for under 10s (see section 8 and 8.3 on specialised training).

11 Parents and carers

How involved do I get with parents/carers when counselling children or young people?

Practitioners working in organisational settings will have to abide by the policies of that organisation. Whether working within an organisation, or as an individual practitioner, careful thought will be needed in respect of confidentiality. As already discussed, a child or young person is entitled to confidentiality unless there are issues of significant harm to the young client or others, or other statutory duties. Any sharing of information with their parents, carers or teachers should be with the full agreement of the young client. See the response to question 4 and Good Practice in Action Legal Resources (www.bacp.co.uk/gpia) for more information about confidentiality.

Note: When setting up the agreement for the therapeutic work, it is good to clarify at this stage how much, or whether there will be any, contact between yourself and the parents/carers during the therapeutic intervention.

11.1 Pitfalls

Often independent practitioner sessions are paid for by parents/carers. This can present difficulties, as payment sometimes comes with expectations from the parent or carer to be 'kept informed'.

The contracting process is therefore very important, to ensure that both the parent/carers and the child or young person understand what you are going to share and agree to it.

The *Ethical Framework for the Counselling Professions* commits members to '...give careful consideration to how we reach agreement with clients and will contract with them about the terms on which our services will be provided...' (Good Practice, point 31).

This can be complex when working with a child or young person as there will often be an agency/school and adults with parental responsibility to consider. It is important that all information given to all parties is compatible, and that your client understands what it is they are seeing you for and agreeing to.

Summary

- As with all therapeutic work, as a practitioner you need to ensure you have the knowledge and skills to work within your competency. Therapeutic work with children and young people is a specialist field, and it is important that practitioners are able to demonstrate their competence, (see www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/competences-and-curricula)
- Supervision with someone competent in working with children and young people is also needed
- It is important to bear in mind that the presenting issues for children and young people can be more complex than in adult work because they are part of a wider system (that is, home/family life, school or college and other agencies)
- Finally, a citation from *Research on counselling and psychotherapy with children and young people: a systematic scoping review of the evidence for its effectiveness from 2003-2011* (McLaughlin et al., 2013):
A particularly important common factor (in this research) appears to be having a relationship with a therapist who is warm, respectful and friendly (p74).

Working with this client group, practitioners need many skills and competences but the most essential ingredient is being able to relate to a child or young person, in a warm, respectful and friendly way.

About the author

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Pattison, S., Robson, M., Beynon, A. (eds) (2018) *The handbook of counselling children and young people 2nd edition*. London: Sage.

Useful resources

BACP Good Practice in Action Resources: www.bacp.co.uk/gpia (accessed 29 September 2020)

BACP Competence Frameworks: www.bacp.co.uk/events-and-resources/ethics-and-standards/competences-and-curricula (accessed 29 September 2020)

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Department of Health guidance on counselling in schools in England: www.gov.uk/government/publications/counselling-in-schools (accessed 29 September 2020)

Disclosure and barring service: www.gov.uk/government/organisations/disclosure-and-barring-service (accessed 29 September 2020)

Information Commissioner's Office: www.ico.org.uk (accessed 29 September 2020)

MindEd: e-learning to support young healthy minds: www.minded.org.uk (accessed 29 September 2020)

NSPCC: www.nspcc.org.uk (accessed 29 September 2020)

Play Therapy United Kingdom: www.playtherapy.org.uk (accessed 29 September 2020)

Schools, colleges and children's services safeguarding: www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education--2 (accessed 29 September 2020).