

## Boundaries within the skilled listening/counselling relationship

Boundaries are how you define what you will allow within the skilled listening/counselling /client relationship. They are the relational framework which allow a professional relationship to develop. They are the invisible fences that separate the client from the skilled listener thus allowing them to take responsibility for themselves. For the skilled listener having boundaries in place allow them to stay physically and emotionally safe. Managing to keep good boundaries means sometimes having to say “no”. This can feel hard and uncaring but if you fail to keep your own boundaries chances are that you will be moving the relationship to a totally different course and even practicing unhealthy behaviour in doing so.

By ensuring that every client you see receives a copy of Life’s Terms of Service you are already putting some boundaries in place. Other boundaries you need to ensure are

- Providing consistency such as offering same time, same place for sessions unless otherwise agreed.
- Ensuring sessions are held in a place where confidentiality can be ensured.
- That sessions are held in a calm environment with no distractions so that focus for both parties is wholly on the session taking place.

Are there any other boundaries that you would put in place?

Compare the following two statements.

## Are boundaries fixed or flexible?

Boundaries should always serve the interests of you and the client. However, there can of course be differing opinions about what these might be. For instance, if you arrive 15 minutes late for a session in a distressed state should the therapist extend the session for 15 minutes, or finish at the normal time? One opinion would be that to extend the session undermines the idea of consistency - essential for clients to feel that at least the structure of therapy is consistent and predictable - whereas an alternative view would be that this lack of flexibility conveys an uncaring attitude. (The therapist must also balance needs e.g. they may have another client waiting to start their session and giving you an extra 15 minutes may make the next client session late, or the extra time may allow the therapist no time to make notes between sessions) Too much flexibility can lead to confusion, whereas too little might lead to a therapist being seen as unhelpful or cold.

What do counsellors & psychotherapist mean by “Professional Boundaries”?  
Kent Rosemary BACP C4 information sheet.

## Boundaries & boundlessness

What is the opposite of being boundaried? One answer is “un-boundaried” another is “boundless”. Un-defensive practice, I suggest, draws on a sense of boundlessness, abundance, space, attention and care. In contact with abundance, the therapist can afford to be generous on many levels, which communicates the experience of abundance to the client, perhaps allowing them to relax about life and its challenges. Yes, a practitioner who cannot offer her client boundaries is dangerous. But a practitioner who cannot offer her clients boundlessness is useless.

Totten Nick (2010 Boundaries & Boundlessness – Therapy Today Vol:21 Issue 8 October)