

The Sherwood Psychotherapy Training Institute  
**SPTI Dual Relationships Policy**

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### **1) Introduction**

This Dual Relationships Policy has been developed by SPTI and should be read in conjunction with the guidance and ethical frameworks of UKCP, HIPC and BACP. This policy covers all core training programmes delivered by SPTI which include Diplomas and Foundation programmes. It is recognised that dual relationships should also be avoided wherever possible within CPD programmes though there may be flexibility dependent on the length and nature of the course.

#### **What are dual relationships?**

For the purposes of this policy it is considered that dual relationships occur when counselling and psychotherapy practitioners, supervisors and trainers assume two (or more) roles simultaneously or sequentially with a client, whether sexual or non-sexual. (see Corey 2009, BACP Good practice in Action 2016-18)

The policy recognises that counselling and psychotherapy practitioners, supervisors and trainers are likely to encounter dual or multiple relationships at some point in their career within the counselling and psychotherapy professions. It recognises that all dual relationships have the potential to cause harm to one or more of the parties involved, as they can compromise essential ethical principles. Hence every effort should be made to avoid dual relationships where there is a potential for misuse of power, impairment of professional judgement and objectivity, increased risk of exploitation or which otherwise could confuse the existing relationship.

#### **Ethical principles underpinning the policy** (see HIPC Policy statement 2016)

- The principle of non-harm and safeguarding against potential abuses of power
- Ethical and honest practice
- Creation of optimum conditions for learning
- Optimum conditions for growth and development of clients/trainees
- Justice objectivity and fairness to ensure and maintain high standards of professional practice for the benefit of clients, trainees and the public
- Respect for the integrity and confidentiality of the relationship between client and to one or more of the parties involved/counsellor
- Respect for the integrity of the training programmes and the learning process
- Respect for the integrity of the assessment and examination procedures
- Principles of openness, transparency and accountability in all different forms of relationships created in training psychotherapists and counsellors
- Value the humanistic principles of individual responsibility, personal autonomy and contractual relationships
- Clients' freedom to choose
- Respect for clients/trainees personal and professional development needs
- Valuing the diversity of life and its complexity as a source of richness for work in its various modalities
- Recognition of the need for congruence with training models and methods
- There is recognition of the limitations of all systems and that whilst clear boundaries and structures are necessary to support it, a degree of flexibility is necessary to manage the tensions between different needs.
- SPTI recognises that the interconnectedness of relationships pertaining to the training of psychotherapists is complex, rich and diverse; and that it is important to be aware of this when creating an integrated training experience.

### **2) Application of this policy**

- Any dual relationships or potential dual relationships should be considered under this policy
- For any dual relationships where the policy requires interpretation the following principle should be applied:
  - o It is understood that all dual relationships have the potential to cause harm to one or more of the parties involved
- Where there is risk of exploitation or other harmful dual relationship either preceding, during or after a working relationship, practitioners should demonstrate their professional commitment to the welfare of their clients and themselves by appropriate consultation, supervision and reflection.

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- Where there is risk of exploitation or other harmful dual relationship either preceding or during training at SPTI, SPTI and Programme Leaders should demonstrate their professional commitment to the welfare of their students and staff by appropriate consultation, supervision and reflection with all relevant parties.
- There is a shared responsibility for being aware of and skillfully managing current and potential dual relationships.
  - o This is important for students and staff during recruitment stage where all relationships should be declared at application and any potential dual relationships be considered and discussed with all relevant parties, maintaining the boundaries of confidentiality.
  - o It is important for supervisees and clients as it is for supervisors and psychotherapists/counsellors
  - o We encourage all students/trainees to enter into an exploration of the boundaries of the field when first meeting a new psychotherapist/counsellor or supervisor, and that each party should take time to explore any potential conflicts before committing to the work.
- **Any potential or existing dual relationships within SPTI should be reported to the Ethics Committee and a record kept of all actions. All members of SPTI, including staff and students have responsibility for reporting any dual relationships they become aware of.**

### **3) Relationships and responsibilities**

With reference to SPTI core counselling and psychotherapy training, the following dual relationships are not permitted:

- 3.1 Therapist/trainer - a therapist cannot also be tutor for the same client/student
- 3.2 Therapist/supervisor - a therapist cannot also be supervisor for the same client
- 3.3 Supervisor/trainer - a trainer cannot also be supervisor to the same student
- 3.4 Tutor/examiner (at the final stage of MSc programmes) – at least one of the assessors/markers should not also be the trainer for a student
- 3.5 Student to trainer - An SPTI student can only become tutor at SPTI after a minimum period of time has passed

#### **3.1 Therapist/trainer**

- A Tutor who is a therapist to a student in a teaching group, should not offer input into that training group, whether directly through teaching or indirectly such as marking or moderation of student work. Where a relationship would have to end if a therapist wished to become a Tutor, *all parties* who are impacted must be consulted to determine an agreeable process to agree the best course of action for all. This may include delaying the Tutor appointment until the client has left the group or waiting till the therapeutic relationship has ended. The process and results of the consultation (client names may be anonymous to respect boundaries of confidentiality) must be reported to the SPTI Ethics Committee, actions agreed and recorded.

A Tutor who is a therapist, would not usually offer input to a training group where a member of the group is their former client. In circumstances where this becomes a possibility, all parties who are impacted must be consulted as soon as possible to determine an agreeable process and any related actions. The process and results of the consultation (client names may be anonymous to respect boundaries of confidentiality) must be reported to the SPTI Ethics Committee, actions agreed and recorded.

#### **Individual Psychotherapy of Students**

SPTI does not usually permit more than one member of any training year group to be in psychotherapy with the same psychotherapist. It is recognised that geographical limitations will impact on this and difficulties should be discussed with the Director of Training and the Ethics Committee.

In the event that a student should discover they share a psychotherapist with another student in the same year group, this should be discussed immediately with the Tutor or Programme Leader. However, SPTI do not wish to disrupt any existing relationships and where possible, these should be honoured. Within this situation, all parties should reflect how these relationships can continue to be safe and ethical and the outcomes should be referred to the SPTI Ethics committee for discussion and approval.

All psychotherapists taking on a SPTI student for their psychotherapy while in training are asked to be skilful in a preliminary exploration of potential boundary issues and to ensure that they do not usually

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take on more than one client from the same group. This means understanding what year the student is attending and what their intentions are for taking time out, etc. In circumstances where this becomes a possibility, all parties who are impacted must be consulted to determine the best course of action for all. The process and results of that consultation must be reported to the Ethics Committee and recorded.

### **3.2 Therapist/supervisor**

- A therapist cannot be both therapist and supervisor to the same client/student. In all cases practitioners and students who are in training should seek an independent supervisor for their work.
- Supervisors have a responsibility to enquire about any other relationships which may exist between supervisees and their clients and/or students, and to indicate any possible conflicts.
- Supervisors who become aware of a conflict between an obligation to a supervisee who is a student and an obligation to SPTI must make explicit to the supervisee the nature of the loyalties and responsibilities involved and consult the relevant Programme Leader and/or a senior member of SPTI staff.

### **3.3 Supervisor/trainer Supervision of Students**

- Supervision of students on the same programme as the tutor is one of the prohibited relationships under this policy. In circumstances where this becomes a possibility following the commencement of the supervision relationship, all parties who are impacted must be consulted to determine and agree the best course of action for all. The process and results of that consultation must be reported to the Ethics Committee, agreed and recorded.
- It is inevitable that more than one supervisee on the same programme may wish to see the same supervisor due to the lack of enough supervisors within a geographical area or where there is group supervision. When this occurs, the parties concerned need to understand that this is a dual relationship. All parties concerned need to consider the potential implications. Students are asked to raise the issues with their supervisor, to establish with the supervisor a clear contract for what material the supervisee will bring into the supervision and how any material concerning the training group might be dealt with. In this way, students are asked to raise their awareness of the potential difficulties inherent in all dual relationships in both psychotherapy and supervision and to practice skilful and mindful communication.
- One supervisor should not supervise more than 50% of any one cohort.

#### **The sharing of information about supervision work**

- In the interests of open communication and support of our students in the clinical situation, it is understood that supervisors and supervisees will share aspects of their supervision work and any questions or concerns with the relevant clinical Tutor, Programme Leader and/or the Head of Training.
- Supervisors and students are asked to share any concerns as soon as they arise and if possible, to discuss this disclosure with the supervisor or supervisee concerning in advance. Where this disclosure has not been discussed in advance, this should be made clear to the Tutor, Programme Leader and/or Head of Training from the outset.

### **3.4 Trainer/examiner at the final stage of MSc programmes**

- Where students are studying towards a Masters level qualification and in their final year of study, one of the tutors marking the work should not be a tutor who is currently training the student.
- This is to create a measure of independence in the assessment procedure - although a tutor could have input in a student's marking process, their role, knowledge and opinion is balanced by one or more others who are not involved in training at the final stage.

#### **Tutor involvement in research**

Tutors who are directly overseeing the research work of a student should not be a participant in the research.

### **3.5 Student to Trainer**

-Student to Trainer is one of the relationships which are not permitted under this policy. Past trainee relationships can exist within the team so long as a recommended time period of 12 months has passed since completion of the training relationship. This is to allow for a period of transition. We recognise that this transition time will vary depending on the nature of the relationship and on the particular negotiations between former student and the relevant Programme Leaders and Tutors. At the end of this transition time there needs to be an acknowledged clear ability to work together on the team and an agreement that there are no remaining significant unresolved /residual issues.

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#### **4) Other potential dual relationships**

##### **Close personal relationships**

- No student or tutor should be a member of a training group which includes their partner or close relation. In the situation of both parties of a primary relationship (e.g., sexual partners, parent/child) being students at the same time, they should not be in the same training group. Tutors of one party only agree to participate in the training of the other after mutual discussion and agreement which has been referred to and approved by the SPTI Ethics Committee.
- Students should not normally be part of a training group where their tutor is a close friend.
- Practitioners should not usually take on a client or supervisee who is a friend, relative, employee, employer or intimates of other clients, supervisees, or Tutors.
- Practitioners should not employ a client's professional services or send a relative or friend to the client for services. Practitioners should avoid seeing clients in any social circumstances outside the therapy context and where this contact happens accidentally, the impact of this needs considering in the therapy session. If the safety or containment of the therapy is impaired and cannot be worked through satisfactorily, the therapy may need to be terminated.
- Engaging in sexual activity with clients, or past clients is unethical.
- Non-professional relationships with former clients should be avoided wherever possible - refer to UKCP BACP ethical frameworks
- Engaging in sexual activity with a supervisee is unethical

##### **SPTI team members**

- When a sexual relationship arises between professional colleagues, they need to review their practices and see that no student, client, supervisee or staff member is compromised by their new relationship. Any potential conflicts of interest that may arise should be made clear to all parties concerned and referred to the SPTI Ethics Committee.
- Staff or Students who become aware of a conflict between their obligation to a student and their obligation to SPTI, must make explicit to both student and SPTI the nature and existence of this conflict, consulting with the Head of Training (or other senior member of SPTI staff) and the Ethics Committee.
- No current psychotherapeutic relationships should exist within the staff and/or training team.
- Past psychotherapeutic relationships can exist within the staff/training team as long as a recommended time period of **three years** have passed since the completion of that relationship. The time period is to allow for a period of transition. SPTI recognise that this transition time will vary depending on the nature of the relationship, the contract and on the particular negotiations between the client and therapist. At the end of this transition time, there needs to be acknowledged a clear ability to work together and an agreement that there are no remaining significant unresolved/residual issues.
- No current supervisory relationship should exist within the staff / training team.
- Past supervisory relationships can exist within the team so long as a recommended period of **three months** has passed since completion of the relationship. This is to allow for a period of transition. SPTI recognise that this transition time will vary depending on the nature of the relationship and on the particular negotiations between supervisor and supervisee. At the end of this transition time, there needs to be acknowledged clear ability to work together and an agreement that there are no remaining significant unresolved/residual issues.

##### **Recruitment procedure:**

Any potential staff member/training applicant must begin to consider current psychotherapeutic, supervisory or intimate personal relationships with the relevant existing staff/training team members or students **before** applying; the names of all current team members can be found on the SPTI website and must be checked by the applicant prior to interview and prior to confirmation of appointment. Where any possible dual relationship exists, the applicant must declare this on the application form. Discussion will be held with the lead interviewer at SPTI if successful at interview and before the recruitment process is completed. SPTI will ensure that procedures are in place, as part of the recruitment of both students and staff, to check that no dual relationships with the potential to cause harm will arise as the result of recruitment. Where the potential for these is identified there will be a full consultation with all parties concerned to determine the best course of action for all and ensure the principle of no harm. This will be reported to the Ethics Committee and recorded.