

# PROFESSIONAL ETHICS: INFORMED CONSENT AND PROFESSIONAL DISCLOSURE IN REALITY THERAPY

Robert E. Wubbolding

*The author is director of the Center for Reality Therapy/Midwest and is on the faculty of Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio.*

In Reality Therapy it is necessary to establish a friendly atmosphere and to help clients determine their wants (Glasser, 1986). Also, at the basis of change in counseling is the necessity of telling the client what the therapist wants or expects, e.g., to take the counseling seriously, to be on time for appointments, etc. Thus, the picture albums of both client and therapist should be laid open in the beginning of counseling. Such self-disclosure both sets the tone and leads to change (Wubbolding, 1985).

This self disclosure especially on the part of the therapist is, in the beginning, merely a discussion of the issue emphasized in the current counseling and psychological literature: *Informed Consent*. Hare-Mustin, Marecek, Kaplan, and Liss-Levinson (1979) state that the informed consent of the client covers three areas:

1. The procedures, goals, and possible side-effects of therapy.
2. The qualifications, policies, and practices of the therapist.
3. The available sources of help other than therapy.

Berger (1982) adds that unlicensed therapists have a special ethical obligation to inform their clients that insurance companies have no responsibility to pay for the therapy. He furthermore says, "The patient has a right to a therapist who is committed solely and completely to promoting his or her best interests and personal welfare. Associated with this is the client's right to be provided with the necessary information to enable him or her to make an informed choice regarding therapy.

The responsibilities of the therapist in connection with this right include the following.

- a. To provide the client at the outset with information concerning goals, procedures, and the therapist's theoretical orientation in regard to the therapeutic process;
- b. To call attention at the outset to any potential value conflicts between therapist and client;
- c. To avoid conflict of interest;
- d. To avoid gratifying his or her own needs at the patient's expense;
- e. Not to engage in any form of sexual activity with the patient" (p. 82).

More emphatically, various ethical codes require that professional persons inform clients about the nature of the service they will receive. Thus, the American Psychological Association (1981) says, "Psychologists fully inform consumers as to the purpose and nature of an evaluative, treatment, educational, or training procedure".

Likewise, the National Association of Social Workers (1979) asserts, "The social worker should provide clients with accurate information regarding the extent and nature of the service available to them." Finally, the American Association for Counseling and Development has stated, "The member must inform the client of the purposes, goals, techniques, rules of procedure and limitations that may affect the relationship at or before the time that the counseling relationship is entered".

## PROFESSIONAL DISCLOSURE

A statement of professional disclosure is most useful in fulfilling this important ethical responsibility. For many years, authors have advocated such a statement (Gross, 1977; Witmer, 1978). Gill (1982) adds that "such a statement would be made available to potential clients prior to an initial interview either by handing the statement to the person or displaying it in a conspicuous place."

The importance of professional disclosure as a means of facilitating informed consent is sometimes reflected in legislation. There are 18 states that license counselors. One such law, the Ohio Counselor and Social Worker Law, requires that if a licensed person receives remuneration, "the client (must be) furnished a copy of a professional disclosure statement unless such a statement is displayed in a conspicuous location at the place where the services are performed and a copy of the statement is provided to the client upon request". The law, based on current counseling literature in this matter, states precisely what must be contained in the statement.

- a. The name, title, business address, and business telephone number of the professional counselor, counselor assistant, social work assistant, social worker, or independent social worker performing the services;
- b. His formal professional education including the institutions he attended, the dates he attended them, and the degrees he received from them;
- c. His areas of competence in the field in which he is licensed or certified and the services he provides;
- d. In the case of a person licensed under this chapter and rules adopted under it who is engaged in a private individual practice, partnership, or group practice, the person's fee schedule, listed by type of service or hourly rate;
- e. At the bottom of the first page of the disclosure statement, the words "This information is required by the Counselor and Social Worker Board, which regulates all licensed and registered counselors and social workers"; and

- f. Immediately beneath the statement required by Division (e) of this section, the name, address, and telephone number of the board.

### PROFESSIONAL DISCLOSURE AND REALITY THERAPY

Below is contained one version of a statement of professional disclosure geared to the practice of Reality Therapy. It contains all of the above mentioned elements and conforms with Ohio's law governing psychologists as well as that governing counselors and social workers.

Therapists and counselors should check respective state laws for variations in requirements. Nevertheless, the reader is invited to adapt the statement for personal use. It also contains a description of Reality Therapy written in non-technical terms for clients.

### SAMPLE STATEMENT OF PROFESSIONAL DISCLOSURE:

#### Areas Of Competence Of Therapists

1. Reality Therapy applied to the following areas and persons: child and adolescent, personal and social, marriage and family, pastoral, employee assistance, mental health, consultation and supervision, diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders.
2. Description of Reality Therapy is attached. This theory will also be discussed with you personally.

#### Fee Schedule

1. At the present time the fee for counseling/therapy is \_\_\_\_\_ per 50 minute session.
2. There is no charge for telephone calls if these are kept to a minimum.

#### Client Rights

The following are client rights.

1. To ask any questions regarding the procedures used during counseling/therapy.
2. To expect confidentiality. Within limits, information revealed by you will be kept confidential. It will not be revealed to other persons or agencies without your written permission.
3. To request in writing any part of your records to be released to any person or agency which you designate. We will tell you whether, in our opinion, making the record public will be harmful to you.

#### Limitations Of Rights

The main limitation is in the area of confidentiality. In certain situations confidentiality does not apply: an order by a court; in the case of child abuse; for your own welfare or that of others in serious or life threatening situations; in the case of death, the surviving spouse or executor of the estate can give consent.

### The Process Of Counseling/Therapy

1. Possible benefits derived from counseling/therapy include:
  - a. Better social relationships.
  - b. Better personal adjustment.
  - c. Better family life.
  - d. Better ability to cope with the problems and stresses of life.
2. It is important to note that we make no guarantees that you will receive these benefits. We believe that a better life is possible for most people. At the same time, our professional ethics do not permit us to make any such guarantees.
3. Counseling/Therapy might involve some feelings of discomfort. These can occur when a person changes his/her life. We view this discomfort as a stepping stone to more effective and satisfying living.

### Commitment To Counseling

1. We promise:
  - A. To provide you with the best help of which we are capable.
  - B. To be straightforward and honest with you.
  - C. To respect your dignity and integrity as a unique person.
2. We ask you:
  - A. To enter counseling for \_\_\_\_\_ 50 minute sessions and agree to pay the fee.
  - B. To provide 24 hour notice if you are unable to keep the appointment. A charge will be made for the time reserved. (This charge is not reimbursed by insurance carriers.)
  - C. To have a designated final session at which we will discuss progress and next steps. This session should be designated prior to the final appointment.

We believe that your commitment is important and helpful to you in order to achieve the goals of your counseling/therapy. Please recognize that there is no moral, legal, or financial obligation to complete the maximum number of sessions listed above. You will be charged only as we have described above.

I fully understand the above agreement and I freely agree to the above conditions.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Client(s) Signature(s)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Psychologist's Signature

The above statements conform with the Ohio Psychology law which regulates the practice of Psychology. Also, this information is required by the Counselor and Social Worker Board which regulates the practice of professional Counseling and Social Work.

Ohio State Board of Psychology State of Ohio Counselor & Social  
65 South Front Street, Room 507 Worker Board  
Columbus, Ohio 43266 65 South Front Street, Room 210  
Columbus, Ohio 43266

Phone: (614) 466-8808

Phone: (614) 466-0912

### DESCRIPTION OF REALITY THERAPY

Reality Therapy is a method of helping people take better control of their lives. It helps people to identify and to clarify what they want and what they need and then to evaluate whether they can realistically attain what they want. It helps them to examine their own behaviors and to evaluate them with clear criteria. This is followed by positive planning designed to help control their own lives as well as fulfill their realistic wants and their needs. The result is added strength, more self-confidence, better human relations, and a personal plan for a more effective life. It, thus, provides people with a self-help tool to use daily to cope with adversity, to grow personally, and to get more effective control of their lives.

Reality Therapy is based on several principles, such as:

1. People are responsible for their own behavior - not society, not heredity, not past history;
2. People can change and live more effective lives;
3. People behave for a purpose - to mold their environment as a sculptor molds clay, to match their own inner pictures of what they want.

The intended results described are achievable through continuous effort and hard work.

The purpose of this article has been to provide the reader with a working knowledge of the importance of one current issue in counseling and therapy: Informed Consent and Professional Disclosure. Authors, professional codes of ethics, and even legislation state that a written statement of counselor competencies, etc., should be provided to clients. A sample statement and working definition of Reality Therapy as a specialty is provided.

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