

**Clinical Psychology Doctorate Programme**

**Guidelines for managing emotional responses within teaching sessions**

These guidelines have been drawn up through consultation with the Trainee Support Committee of The Hull University Clinical Psychology training course, training course staff and workshop organisers. They are designed to cover the following instances that may, not infrequently, arise in teaching sessions on the course:

* Teaching involves the presentation of material that trainees may find distressing
* Teaching encourages trainees to reflect on personal experiences that may have an emotional impact on them.
* Trainees attending teaching sessions may also be struggling with personal issues that trigger upset unexpectedly.

It is inevitable that the very nature of clinical psychology training will involve exposure to distressing material and this is recognised as a demand of the job role in being a clinical psychologist:

*“Frequent indirect exposure to highly distressing or highly emotional circumstances”. (Agenda for Change, Job Evaluation handbook 2004)*

Therefore, learning to manage (rather than avoid) these inevitable potential emotional responses and learning effective strategies for self care are an integral part of clinical psychology training courses and competencies in themselves that must be demonstrated by the end of training:

*“Developing strategies to handle the emotional and physical impact of own practice and seeking appropriate support when necessary, with good awareness of boundary issues” [CTCP core competencies p5 2002]*

This is particularly important as self-awareness, reflection and skills in relationship-based working are increasingly valued in the profession. The course has developed a ‘personal and professional development’ strategy that includes teaching input, together with a range of personal and professional support mechanisms. We have produced these specific guidelines for all teaching sessions with the following aims:

* Wherever possible, to ensure that teaching sessions are experienced by all as safe and containing to provide a good environment for learning
* To enable and support self-monitoring of distress and to ensure the *shared responsibility between trainee and teaching staff* for setting boundaries on personal exposure to this within a teaching session.
* For any emotional distress to be handled in a predictable, sensitive way within teaching sessions
* To ensure that clear boundaries are kept during teaching sessions, avoiding any direct work on individual or group issues without gaining clear consent from the trainee(s).
* To ensure that both trainees and teachers are clear about what actions would be appropriate during and after a session if personal issues have been raised

These guidelines do not attempt to prevent the provoking of emotional responses for trainees, but aim to ensure that facilitators and trainees work together to ensure that these responses remain as manageable as possible. Guidance from facilitators within sessions may need to be more detailed/ explicit for fourth year trainees, as compared to sixth year trainees who may have developed more experience in managing their emotional responses.

These guidelines have been structured around the three stages of a teaching workshop: preparation, during the workshop and after the teaching session ends.

**Preparation**

* Trainees have a responsibility to decide whether there is any relevant information a workshop organiser/ facilitator needs to know (in private) at the start of a workshop. This could include disclosure of personal circumstances if the trainee anticipates any possible difficulty in managing their responses to a training session. It is also, for example, acceptable for a trainee to opt out of a bereavement workshop if they have recently been bereaved. If trainees are unsure, they are encouraged to discuss this with their personal tutor

* Facilitators are encouraged to reflect on their reasons for including any distressing material in their presentation and be ready to give trainees a clear rationale for its inclusion if it is felt to be appropriate.
* Where facilitators are planning to encourage self-reflection, thought should be given in advance to how an exercise will be set up and what guidance will be given to trainees, including what they could do if they feel upset. Where trainees may have been reflecting on emotional material or conducting role-plays, adequate time must be given in the schedule to allow de-briefing and processing of any ‘in-role’ feelings.
* Facilitators may like to consider exploring self-care strategies with trainees as part of their workshop. This may also include offering to speak to trainees outside of the teaching session +/or encouraging them to talk with a member of course staff or use their personal support system.
* Facilitators should be aware that trainees have a right to opt out of any exercise they feel maybe distressing for them at the current time. However, it is important that repeated avoidance of potentially distressing material does not limit trainee’s opportunities for learning how to deal more effectively with this important demand of their role as a clinical psychologist.

**Within teaching sessions**

* Trainees are responsible for monitoring their emotional responses to teaching. They can leave a teaching session if they recognise they are becoming upset in order to limit their exposure to further distress. In general, the facilitator will allow them space at this point, rather than seeking to discuss the cause of any distress with the individual. Trainees are encouraged to return if possible.
* Any discussion with the individual about their distress should be conducted on a one-to-one basis and the trainee is free to give as much or as little detail as they feel comfortable with. It would be appropriate to check with a trainee that they are ok on their return or at the end of the session and to ask if there is anything the facilitator can do.
* Wherever possible, trainees should be informed about the overall nature of any distressing material before its presentation and also given a rationale for its inclusion. Trainees can then be given the opportunity to opt out if they feel unable to participate e.g. due to personal issues.
* Where self-reflection is required, trainees should be given guidance on the depth of this that is required for the purpose of the exercise.
* It is not appropriate for teaching sessions to seek to work with internal or external conflicts with trainees unless this experiential component has been planned in advance, consented to by trainees and is guided by a set of agreed and explicit ground rules within the group
* Facilitators should allow sufficient time for trainees to de-brief after self-reflective or role-play exercises +/or o reflect on what self-care strategies may be helpful.
* Both facilitators and trainees should be mindful that if subsequent discussion periods or breaks are being dominated by reference to previous emotional impact, there might not have been sufficient time to de-brief earlier, so some flexibility is needed in timings. If trainees are aware that this is occurring, they should inform the workshop facilitator.
* Workshop facilitators may in certain circumstances consider providing information to trainees who may have been personally impacted by teaching content e.g.

*“This workshop (on Autistic Spectrum Disorders) may raise personal queries if you have a friend or family member possibly affected. If so, the National Autistic Society (NAS) has internet and telephone helplines for families and for professionals that may prove useful. Details are on the NAS website (www.nas.org.uk)”.*

**Post teaching session**

* The teacher should check that any trainee who has been distressed is ok at the end of the session. They can encourage the trainee to seek support if necessary from personal or professional support networks (ie friends, their personal tutor or supervisor)
* Should a teacher have any concerns about the welfare of a trainee or trainee group, they should consider speaking to a member of course staff to pass on these concerns.
* Wherever possible, a member of course staff will be available at the end of teaching sessions for either teaching staff or trainees to approach to discuss any issues.
* Any serious concerns (e.g. fitness to practice) should be put in writing to the Academic Co-ordinator or Course Director.
* Trainees can provide written feedback on a teaching session via the TQA form or through discussion with staff members. Again, any serious concerns about any aspect of teaching should be put into writing.
* If a trainee leaves a session because they are distressed, they should inform the Academic Co-ordinator within a week of the session. This can be done in person or via e-mail, whichever the trainee prefers.

**References**

“Planning teaching Guidelines for trainers: Use of sensitive or distressing material” A document produced by the University of Leeds Clinical Psychology training course [www.leeds.ac.uk/hsphr/psychiatry/courses/dclin/trainees/ppis\_pack/ppis\_8\_sad]

Academic Team

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