

MODEL OF SUPPORT – TIME LIMITED WORKING POLICY AND PRACTICE GUIDELINES

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Summary

This Policy applies to all Cruse Scotland volunteers and staff.

This Policy and associated Guidelines does not currently apply to volunteers working with children and young people and adults with learning difficulties.

Practice Guidelines are provided from P7-P8.

Further supplementary guidelines (P8) are provided to cover the handling of DNAs and cancellations.

Recommended Further Reading

COSCA Statement of Ethics and Code of Practice (Sections 3.1, 3.3, 3.7) Colin Feltham, Time-Limited Counselling; Sage 1997

Colin Feltham and Ian Horton (eds), Handbook of Counselling and Psychotherapy; Sage 2004 and 2012

Policy framework and context

Purpose

This document sets out Cruse Scotland policy on time limited working with bereaved clients.

Ethical framework

The COSCA Statement of Ethics and Code of Practice endorses comprehensively the concept of contracting with clients such that the length and nature of the engagement is to be managed.

Section 3.1 of the Code of Practice states:

A member will state clearly at the onset of the working relationship with a client any terms, conditions, methods of practice, and extent of confidentiality, preferably in a written form. Also, as clear an indication as possible should be made as to the duration and nature of the work, including any possible limitations.

Section 3.3 requires that the client is given adequate opportunity in the course of the working relationship to review its progress and effectiveness; and

Section 3.7 requires that the client is well-prepared for the termination of the working relationship.

Scope

This policy and the associated guidelines apply to:

- Skilled Listeners, Advanced Skills Listeners and Counsellors
- All Cruse Scotland volunteers and paid staff

The policy does not apply currently to volunteers working with children, young people, and adults with learning difficulties

Context

The average number of adult sessions across the organisation in 2022-2023 offered to Cruse Scotland clients was 5.2. The most common is six sessions.

The Cruse Scotland organisational strategy demonstrates a commitment to keep waiting times to a minimum.

Cruse Scotland volunteers are an invaluable resource for bereaved people who seek support from us. To provide our vulnerable client group with a safe, effective, and ethical service requires a number of conditions to be met. For example:

- Where support is offered it must, for the safety of both volunteer and client take place in managed premises or a secure online or telephone connection.
- Quality supervision is an essential component of supporting volunteers to do the best, ethical work they can.
- Cruse Scotland must be able to reimburse the costs incurred by volunteers in the course of their volunteer work with bereaved people; not to be able to do so would create barriers for some potential volunteers and this would be discriminatory.

Each of these components carries a cost in terms of volunteer resources as well as a financial cost. Finite numbers of volunteers and levels of funding however place significant limitations on the number of bereaved people we can support.

Time boundaries inevitably must also be carefully attended to since unmanaged, flexible boundaries have a direct impact on the number of clients that can be supported.

Cruse Scotland seeks to balance these pressures and concerns in the best way possible to support volunteers fully and safely in their work and to provide quality service to as many bereaved people who seek our support as we possibly can.

Evidence

Time limited counselling is not... 'a hurried and superficial activity, as some of its critics like to suggest, but is simply one way of doing counselling differently.'

Colin Feltham Time Limited Counselling – Sage 1997

A considerable amount of research evidence has demonstrated that most counselling and therapy takes place within a fairly limited number of sessions, and that clients seem to benefit more from earlier than from later sessions.

John McLeod - An Introduction to Counselling - OUP 2013

Competency/training

Training will be the normal standard for the specific roles.

Legal context

Volunteers should be aware that in working with a client and agreeing the detail of meeting (e.g., number of sessions, reviews, and confidentiality) this forms a contract between Cruse Scotland and the client. This is done in accordance with the agreed policies and practices of Cruse Scotland. In the extreme event of the contract being broken and any subsequent complaint, it is Cruse Scotland that is called to account and not the volunteer.

Professional opinion is still divided as to whether a contract which involves informed consent is binding and therefore legal. Cruse Scotland along with COSCA and BACP regards breaking of the contract to be one that can and should result in a formal complaint being made by the client or by Cruse Scotland itself. Cruse Scotland wishes to take the view therefore that the contract of informed consent is a legal contract and one that all volunteers must take seriously as if it has undisputed legal force out of respect for Cruse Scotland, the client, and the therapeutic process.

Practice guidelines

Introduction

Principle of contracting.

Research and best practice indicate that a robust intake process plays a key role in an effective time limited service. The Initial Client Interview (ICI), as an integral part of our service delivery model, fulfils this role.

Counselling Skills training at an early stage introduces the concept of contracting with the client. This has been regarded as good practice for many years. It helps the client be clear about the process they are entering into and assists the volunteer to support and manage the clients' expectations. Like many boundaries this can help the client to feel safe and contained.

It should be made clear to clients:

- At the end of the ICI when a score indicating intervention is the outcome, and
- When a first appointment with a Skilled Listener, an Advanced Skills Listener or a Counsellor is offered by the Area Co-ordinator that they will be offered a time limited contract wherein the number of sessions offered is up to a maximum of six with the expectation that for some clients a lesser number will be clinically appropriate.

At the first session of one-to-one support, client facing volunteers should make a time limited contract with their clients with the informed consent of the client to the number of sessions. It should also be made clear that the client and the volunteer may mutually agree to end the work sooner.

The volunteer will review the work with their client in supervision in the normal way and, not later than the penultimate session, will in conjunction with their supervisor decide if, exceptionally, further sessions up to a maximum of 6 with the client are clinically indicated.

At the same time and prior to meeting the supervisor, the volunteer should consult with the Area Manager should it be clinically necessary for the work to continue beyond the contracted number of sessions. The Area Manager is responsible for managing service delivery and meeting the Cruse Scotland Priorities and can only do so effectively if they are fully informed about the likely demands on resources.

Thus, the clinical judgement on the continuation or ending of the work at or before six sessions rests with the volunteer and the supervisor, whilst the management of resources on behalf of Cruse Scotland rests with the Area Manager.

When following these clinical and managerial considerations further sessions are to be offered then: Only up to a maximum of a further six sessions if needed can be offered. Some clients may only need one or two extra sessions. After this time, if the client appears to need further support, they must be referred on to other organisations for support.

Supplementary operational guidelines

Did Not Attend (DNAs)

If the client fails to turn up for an appointment and does not contact Cruse Scotland –

The Area Co-ordinator will contact the client by email to identify whether further support is required to confirm next appointment by an agreed deadline. Client should be advised that support will automatically be ended after a second DNA.

Following a second DNA, the Area Co-ordinator should write to the client informing them that, as they have failed to attend a second session, without notice, they have been removed from our service. If, at a later date, they are able to commit to regular support, they can re- refer themselves to the service and join the waiting list at this point. Clients can be reminded that ‘in the moment’ support can be accessed through GriefChat and our Helpline.

Cancellations

If the client makes contact to say that they are unable to attend their appointment and it is for an unavoidable reason, they will be offered a new appointment.

Where a client has had to cancel two or more appointments the Area Co-ordinator and the volunteer should agree who would be best to speak to the client about their ability to continue with their counselling sessions at this time.

Changes sheet

Date	Change Details	Author
18.08.2014	Summary Sheet Added	Sarah Dundas
21.08.2014	Additional wording relating to children	Elaine Dunleavy
15.07.2015	Updated	Elaine Bayley
13.11.2015	Page 3-page numbers changed	Elaine Bayley
14.07.2017	Review date amended as requested by PGT	Elaine Bayley
10.01.2022	Reviewed and updated.	Wendy Diack
05.05.2023	Supplementary Operation Guidelines updated as requested by PGT when last presented for approval – Jan 2022.	Wendy Diack
10.05.2023	Supplementary Operation Guidelines updated.	Wendy Diack
01.08.2025	Reformatted document to 2025 house style	Ed Strutt