

Student counsellor factsheet

Placement considerations

Finding a placement

- Many courses may offer 'support' to find a placement but the reality is that it can require a lot of time and effort from the trainee.
 - Be prepared to send multiple emails, make phone calls, fill in application forms, go for interviews etc. All of which is additional to the time spent doing college work and other life commitments
 - Many placement providers only have very limited places available and these may be only on very specific days or times. Depending on your working week, college days or family commitments you will need to be able to have some degree of flexibility to make it work for you. Consider if you would be able or willing to do evenings or weekends to give yourself more opportunity.
 - Some trainees find that they may require more than one placement to achieve the hours required by their course. It may even be that one placement only offers online sessions and the course requires a mix of remote and in-person hours. Having more than one placement can also be beneficial to give experience of different client groups, such as adults vs young people – or different presentations, such as bereavement, anxiety, domestic abuse for example. Placement work is a really valuable testing ground for your skills and can be helpful to discover your strengths and preferred client specialisation.
 - Some courses may put restrictions on the clients that you can work with at that stage of your training – working with children and young people may be restricted to a limited number of hours. Hours gained working remotely may only be able to be counted towards part of your overall hours – this could be another benefit to having more than one placement

Will the placement support my needs

- Although a placement may be hard to find, make sure the placement feels that it is within your skill set and offers the support you need at this stage
 - Ensure that the clients that the placement supports are within your capacity based on what you have been taught. Dealing with clients who have experienced high levels of trauma or abuse, significant ongoing risk or crisis may not match with your capacities at this early stage. It is unreasonable to feel confident that you will meet each client's needs, but giving yourself the best chance from the outset should be a careful consideration. You can also draw upon your other life skills and experiences.

- Placements are often run as part of the voluntary sector – meaning that they are dependent on people giving up their time for free to support the work offered. It is still important that they offer sufficient support with appropriate training, management and oversight so that the client work can be conducted in the best possible circumstances.
- Working closely with a manager or supervisor in a placement is essential to ensure that the right clients are being allocated to match the therapists level of competence, to help manage risk, to deal with unexpected events and to safeguard the client and therapist. Feeling comfortable with the availability of that person can be an important consideration for a placement – knowing that someone is around to check in with after every session may be what is needed at this early stage or perhaps being comfortable with more autonomy and only checking in when required is enough for you.
- Placements have a varied approach for handling referrals, it would be important to find out who is responsible for doing the initial needs and risk assessment – if this is left to the therapist, will there be appropriate training? Do you feel comfortable completing this? Do you have any experience of this?

Considerations while on placement

- Although a placement should be considering the therapists level of experience, often it is difficult to know until you meet the client what their needs are and these can change throughout the course of the work.
 - An important part of training to be a therapist is knowing when a client is outside of your level of competence – and this will not be uncommon at these early stages. Finding out with the placement what the process is for referring on or signposting if the client is beyond your capabilities should be considered. Although there is a lot of pressure to gain the necessary client hours, it is still important to recognise when a clients needs may be beyond your own. Being open with a placement supervisor about the presentation of a client in an area you have no experience or training in will help build stronger supportive relationships within the placement. It may also be that additional supervision in this area is needed to be able to continue.
 - Clients should always be made aware that you are a trainee therapist on a placement, this avoids any confusion or clients feeling that they have been misled. This also protects you as the trainee therapist. Often the placement will manage this when services are advertised, but it should also be an important part of contracting with your client. Reassuring them that you have received extensive and appropriate training and that you are supported closely by your supervisor and your placement should be the focus of this, not your lack of experience. The client does not need to know how many hours of experience you have had with actual clients, this could be 0 hours or 99 hours, but the focus is more on what you have rather than what you lack.

- An important part of training to be a therapist is managing missed sessions with clients. Unfortunately, placement counselling can often have a higher rate of missed sessions for a variety of reasons, one of which is that it is often free of charge for the client, so there is little consequence if they don't attend. It can also be that the therapy sessions are advised or mandated as part of access to other areas of support, so the client is lacking the drive to invest or prioritise the sessions. Managing the frustration of clients not attending, especially when you have had to make time in your week for your placement can be a significant part of your placement experience.
- All placements will have procedures, policies and data recording elements that can vary significantly depending on their requirements. You may be required to do risk assessments or symptom questionnaires as part of every session, input data or client notes onto a computer system, collaborate with other members of the placement team or give progress reports to others. Expectations can be intensive or minimal, depending on the placement, so it would be important to consider what their expectations are of you, your experience and how much time you have to complete the tasks being asked of you.
- Maintaining the boundaries of your therapeutic work can be another challenge of a placement but also an important part of your training experience. Other members of an organisation may not have the same understanding of client confidentiality and may ask for confidential information as it pertains to a client they are working within their role. Keeping client confidentiality paramount, ensuring any required note taking is based on themes and doesn't include any identifying personal information, as well as not being drawn into any speculation or discussing a client outside of direct supervision is a key skill.
- Often as part of a placement, an assessment will be conducted at the midpoint and at completion of the required placement hours. This is usually conducted by your clinical supervisor but can also have input by your manager or supervisor at the placement. Having an open and honest relationship during your placement with those that support you, taking issues and challenges as well as things that have gone well is key to getting the most out of your experience. A supervisor can only give honest and effective feedback based on the information that a therapist has shared with them, and a therapist can only benefit if a supervisor is able to recognise the strengths and weaknesses that can help them grow and develop.

Having the right supervisor during a placement, which is often your first real life experience of being a therapist, is essential to help navigate many of the different areas highlighted above. Although a key part, it goes far beyond your ability to support your clients, and involves a helping hand to navigate the complex, stressful and unpredictable nature of working in placement organisations.

Supervisors at Towards Tranquility have experience of supporting trainees at this critical part of their journey, so check out the website for more information and a no



obligation initial chat with Liz or Rachel to see if they can be the right supervisor for you.

<https://www.towardstranquility.com/>

