


## MEMORANDUM

<b>DATE</b>	July 30, 2018
<b>TO</b>	Psychology Board Members
<b>FROM</b>	 Antonette Sorrick Executive Officer
<b>SUBJECT</b>	Agenda Item 25(i): "Therapy Never Includes Sexual Behavior" Brochure – Update

### **Background:**

In 2011, the Department of Consumer Affairs made some minor edits to the publication "Professional Therapy Never Includes Sex." With the proliferation of technology and social media, staff recommends the brochure be reviewed for necessary updates. The Outreach and Education Committee recommended staff proceed with working with the Medical Board of California (MBC) and the Board of Behavioral Sciences (BBS) to update the title and content of this brochure. The project was separated into five phases:

- 1) Staff at all three boards will review the content and include suggested amendments - completed
- 2) Licensees (experts) from all three boards will review the suggested amendments and make final edits to the publication – completed
- 3) Medical Board, Osteopathic Medical Board, Board of Behavioral Sciences Board all to share draft brochure with their respective boards and provide feedback to Department of Consumer Affairs' (DCA) Publication Unit
- 4) Publication Unit to send draft back to all four boards
- 5) Boards provide final feedback to DCA

At the February 2018 Board Meeting, the Board provided edits to the draft document. After, staff forwarded the updated draft to Osteopathic Medical Board. No additional edits were made. On April 26, Dr. Casuga notified staff that an edit was missing from the draft brochure.

The draft brochure is currently with DCA where they await a change to the B&P Code Sections 337 & 728 to move forward with publication. AB 2698 (Levine) was introduced on February 16, 2018 which will address both code sections.

### **Action Requested:**

Review draft brochure with highlighted section related to bartering language in the brochure. Board Member Casuga requested the Board consider this language in comparison to the American Psychological Association's Ethical Principles of Psychologists and Code of Conduct language regarding bartering. The Board is asked to consider the impact of this language on the licensees in all three boards.

- 1• CONSUMERS
- 2• MEDIA
- 3• PUBLICATIONS
- 4• ONLINE SERVICES

## 5 Professional Therapy Never Includes Sexual Behavior

6 Printer Friendly Version

7 **State of California**  
8 **Department of Consumer Affairs**

9 Copyright © 2011~~2018~~, Department of Consumer Affairs

10 California's lawmakers, licensing boards, and ethical therapists want the public to know that  
11 professional therapy never includes sexual contact between a therapist and a client. It also never  
12 includes inappropriate sexual suggestions, or any other kind of sexual behavior between a therapist  
13 and a client. Sexual contact of any kind between a therapist and a client is unethical and illegal in the  
14 state of California. Additionally, with regard to former clients, sexual contact within two years after  
15 termination of therapy is also illegal and unethical. It is always the responsibility of the therapist to  
16 ensure that sexual contact with a client, whether consensual or not, does not occur.

17 Dear Reader:

18 ~~As a reader of "Professional Therapy Never Includes Sexual Contact," you may be a California~~  
19 ~~consumer concerned about the conduct of your therapist. You may be a licensed therapist, or training~~  
20 ~~to become a therapist. In any case, it's good to know more about the high standards of professional~~  
21 ~~conduct expected—and required—in the therapy relationship.~~

22 ~~Consumers are looking for professionals they can trust. Therapists value the trust of their patients.~~  
23 ~~When this mutual trust is violated by sexual exploitation, everyone loses. The patient loses an~~  
24 ~~opportunity for improved health and becomes a victim. The therapist stops being a healer and~~  
25 ~~becomes a victimizer. And the profession itself loses when the good reputation of the many is~~  
26 ~~diminished by the illegal conduct of a few.~~

27 ~~The California Department of Consumer Affairs is dedicated to working with its professional licensing~~  
28 ~~board partners to protect and educate consumers. If you are a victim of sexual abuse by a therapist,~~  
29 ~~it's important for you to report your experience to the board that licenses your therapist.~~

30 ~~This booklet offers guidance and resources for consumers. For more consumer guidelines and~~  
31 ~~information, you may contact the appropriate licensing board or professional association, or contact~~  
32 ~~the Department of Consumer Affairs at 1-800-952-5210 or [www.dca.ca.gov](http://www.dca.ca.gov).~~

33 California Department of Consumer Affairs

34 Publishing Information

35 ~~The 2011 edition of "Professional Therapy Never Includes Sexual Contact" is published by the~~  
36 ~~California Department of Consumer Affairs. This publication is a joint project of the California Board of~~  
37 ~~Psychology, the California Board of Behavioral Sciences and the Department of Consumer Affairs'~~  
38 ~~Office of Publications, Design & Editing.~~

39 ~~This booklet is available in the "Publications" section of the Department of Consumer Affairs' Web~~  
40 ~~site [www.dca.ca.gov](http://www.dca.ca.gov).~~

41 ~~Single copies of the publication are available at no charge from the boards listed above and from~~  
42 ~~Publications Office, California Department of Consumer Affairs, P.O. Box 989004, West Sacramento,~~  
43 ~~CA 95798-0004.~~

44 This booklet may be copied, if (1) the meaning of copied text is not changed or misrepresented, (2)  
45 credit is given to the California Department of Consumer Affairs, and (3) all copies are distributed free  
46 of charge.

#### 47 Acknowledgments

48 The Department of Consumer Affairs, the Board of Psychology and the Board of Behavioral Sciences  
49 wish to thank former Senator Diane Watson, whose Senate Task Force on Psychotherapist and  
50 Patient Sexual Relations prompted the development of "Professional Therapy Never Includes Sex" in  
51 1990.

52 Copyright © 2017, Department of Consumer Affairs

53 California law requires that the Department of Consumer Affairs provide an informational brochure for  
54 victims of psychotherapist-patient sexual contact and their advocates.

55 California's lawmakers, licensing boards, professional associations and ethical therapists want such  
56 inappropriate sexual behavior stopped. This booklet was developed to help patients who have been  
57 sexually exploited by their therapist. It outlines their rights and options for reporting what happened. It  
58 also defines therapist sexual exploitation, gives warning signs of unprofessional behavior, presents a  
59 "Patient Bill of Rights," and answers some frequently asked questions.

60

61 • Introduction

62 • Definition of Terms

63 • Client Rights

64 • Warning Signs

65 • What If It's Me?

66 • Common Reactions to Sexual Misconduct by a Therapist

67 • Where To Start

68 • What You Can Do

69 ——— Your Reporting Options

70 ——— More About Administrative Action

71 ——— More About Professional Association Action

72 ——— More About Civil Actions

73 ——— More About Criminal Action

74 • Where to Get Help

75 ——— Finding a Therapist

76 ——— Self-Help Support Groups

77 • Frequently Asked Questions

78 • Patient Bill of Rights

79

## INTRODUCTION

Professional psychotherapy never includes sex. It also never includes verbal sexual advances or any other kind of sexual contact or behavior. Sexual contact of any kind between a therapist and a patient is unethical and illegal in the state of California. Additionally, with regard to former patients, sexual contact within two years after termination of therapy is also illegal and unethical.

Sexual behavior between a therapist and a patient/client can also be harmful to the patient/client. Harm may arise from the therapist's exploitation of the patient/client to fulfill his or her own needs or desires, and from the therapist's loss of the objectivity necessary for effective therapy. All therapists are trained and educated to know that this kind of behavior is illegal and unethical inappropriate and can result in the revocation of their professional license.

Therapists are trusted and respected, and it is common for patients to admire and feel attracted to them, by their clients, and it is not uncommon for clients to admire and feel attracted to them. However, a therapist who accepts or encourages the expression of these feelings through sexual behavior with the therapist/client these normal feelings in a sexual way - or tells a patient/client that sexual involvement is part of therapy - is illegal, unethical, and it violates the therapeutic relationship, and engages in conduct that may be illegal and unethical, using the trusting therapeutic relationship to take advantage of the patient. Once sexual involvement begins, therapy for the patient ends. The original issues that brought the patient to therapy are postponed, neglected, and sometimes lost. This kind of abusive behavior can cause harmful, long-lasting, emotional and psychological effects to the client.

Many people who endure this kind of abusive behavior from therapists suffer harmful, long-lasting emotional and psychological effects. Family life and friendships are often disrupted, or sometimes ruined.

California's lawmakers, licensing boards, professional associations and ethical therapists want such inappropriate sexual behavior stopped. This booklet was developed to help patients who have been sexually exploited by their therapists. It outlines their rights and options for reporting what happened. It also defines therapist sexual exploitation, gives warning signs of unprofessional behavior, presents a "Patient Bill of Rights," and answers some frequently asked questions.

## DEFINITION OF TERMS

Throughout this booklet, the terms "therapist," "therapy" and "patient/client" will be used. "Therapist" refers to anyone who is licensed to practice psychotherapy, or is training to become licensed, and includes:

- ~~Psychiatrists (physicians practicing psychotherapy)~~ Physicians and Surgeons (Psychiatrists)
- Psychologists
- Registered ~~p~~Psychologists
- Psychological ~~i~~nterns
- Psychological ~~a~~ssistants
- Licensed ~~e~~clinical ~~s~~ocial ~~w~~orkers
- Registered ~~a~~ssociate ~~e~~clinical ~~s~~ocial ~~w~~orkers
- Licensed ~~m~~arriage and ~~f~~amily ~~t~~herapists
- Registered Associate ~~M~~arriage ~~M~~arriage and ~~F~~amily ~~t~~herapists ~~registered interns and trainees~~
- Licensed ~~p~~rofessional ~~e~~clinical ~~e~~counselors
- Registered Associate ~~P~~rofessional ~~e~~clinical ~~e~~counselors interns
- Licensed Educational Psychologists
- Registered Research Psychoanalysts

The terms "therapy," "therapist" and "patient" in this booklet also refer to educational psychology, educational psychologists and their clients. Though educational psychologists do not practice psychotherapy, these licensed professionals work with clients, performing educational evaluations, diagnosis, and test interpretation.

"Therapy" includes any type of mental health counseling from any of the licensed or registered professionals, therapists listed above. "Client" "Patient" refers to anyone receiving therapy, or counseling, or other services.

According to California laws:

Any act of sexual contact, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, sexual misconduct or sexual relations by a therapist with a patient client is unprofessional, illegal, as well as unethical, as set forth in Business and Professions Code sections 726, 729, 2960(e), 4982(k), 4992.3(l), 4989.54(n), and 4999.90(k).

"Sexual contact" means the touching of an intimate part of another person, including sexual intercourse.

"Sexual behavior" means inappropriate contact or communication of a sexual nature. This definition does not include the provision of appropriate therapeutic interventions relating to sexual issues.

"Touching" means physical contact with another person either through the person's clothes or directly with the person's skin.

"Intimate part" means the sexual organ, anus, groin or buttocks of any person, and the breast of a female.

"License" includes certificate, registration or other means to engage in a business or profession regulated by Chapter 1, General Provisions, section 475 of the Business and Professions Code.

~~"Sexual behavior" means inappropriate contact or communication of a sexual nature.~~

Commented [KK1]: Already listed above this is duplicative.

Sexual exploitation can include sexual intercourse, sodomy, oral copulation, or any other sexual contact between a therapist and a patient or a former patient under certain circumstances. Sexual misconduct includes a much broader range of activity, which may include fondling, kissing, spanking, nudity, verbal suggestions, innuendoes or advances. This kind of sexual behavior by a therapist with a patient is unethical, unprofessional and illegal.

## CLIENT RIGHTS

You, as a Client, have the right to:

- Request and receive information about the therapist's professional capabilities, including licensure, education, training, experience, professional association membership, specialization and limitations.
- Be treated with dignity and respect.
- A safe environment, free from sexual, physical, and emotional abuse.
- Ask questions about your therapy or other services from your provider.
- Decline to answer any question or disclose any information you choose not to reveal.
- Request and receive information from the therapist about your progress toward your treatment goals.
- Know the limits of confidentiality and the circumstances in which a therapist is legally required to disclose information to others.

- Know if there are supervisors, consultants, students, or others with whom your therapist will discuss your case.
- Decline a particular type of treatment, or end treatment without obligation or harassment.
- Refuse electronic recording.
- Request and (in most cases) receive a summary of your file, including the diagnosis, your progress, and the type of treatment.
- Report unethical and illegal behavior by a therapist (see "What You Can Do").
- Receive a second opinion at any time about your therapy or your therapist's methods.
- Receive a copy of your file or have a copy of your file transferred to any therapist or agency you choose.

## WARNING SIGNS

In most sexual misconduct abuse or exploitation cases, other inappropriate behavior comes first. While it may be subtle or confusing, it usually feels uncomfortable to the patient/client. Some clues or warning signs are:

- Telling sexual jokes or stories-
- ~~"Making eyes at" or giving seductive looks to the patient.~~
- ~~Discussing the therapist's sex life or relationships excessively.~~
- Sending obscene images or messages to the client
- ~~Sitting too close, initiating hugging, holding the patient or lying next to the patient. Unwanted physical contact.~~
- Excessive out-of-session communication (e.g., text, phone, email, social media, etc.) not related to therapy

Another warning sign is "special" treatment by a therapist, such as:

- Inviting a patient/client to lunch, dinner, or other social and professional activities-
- Dating-
- Changing any of the office's business practices (for example e.g., scheduling late appointments when no one is around, having sessions away from the office, etc.)-
- Confiding in a patient/client (e.g., about the therapist's love life, work problems, loneliness, marital problems, etc.)-
- Telling a patient/client that he or she is special, or that the therapist loves him or her-
- Relying on a patient/client for personal and emotional support-
- Giving or receiving significant gifts-

Signs of inappropriate behavior and misuse of power include:

- Hiring a patient/client to do work for the therapist, or bartering goods or services to pay for therapy-
- Suggesting or supporting the patient's/client's isolation from social support systems, increasing dependency on the therapist-
- Providing or using alcohol (or drugs) during sessions-
- ~~Any violation of the patient's rights as a consumer (see "Patient Bill of Rights," page 24).~~

Therapy is meant to be a guided learning experience, during which therapists help patients to find their own answers and feel better about themselves and their lives. A patient should never feel intimidated or threatened by a therapist's behavior.

If you are experiencing any of these warning signs, you have the right to file a complaint with the appropriate licensing board and consult with another therapist. trust your own feelings. Check on discuss the therapist's behavior with a different therapist, or with any of the agencies in "Where To

**Commented [BC2]:** Per Dr. Casuga - The language here about bartering seems stronger than in the APA Ethical Guideline 6.05:

6.05 Barter With Clients/Patients  
Barter is the acceptance of goods, services, or other nonmonetary remuneration from clients/patients in return for psychological services. Psychologists may barter only if (1) it is not clinically contraindicated, and (2) the resulting arrangement is not exploitative. (See also Standards 3.05, Multiple Relationships, and 6.04, Fees and Financial Arrangements.)

Start.” (see page 10). Depending on what you find out, you may want to find another therapist and report the inappropriate behavior to the proper licensing board.

## **WHAT IF IT'S ME? COMMON REACTIONS TO SEXUAL MISCONDUCT BY A THERAPIST**

If a therapist has engaged in any sexual behavior or contact with you, you may experience some or all of the following feelings or reactions:

If you have been sexually abused or exploited by your therapist, you may be feeling confused. You may feel:

- Intimidation or threatened
- Guilty and responsible responsibility - even though it is the therapist's responsibility to keep sexual behavior out of therapy.
- Mixed feelings about the therapist – e.g., protectiveness, anger, love, betrayal.
- Isolated and empty emptiness.
- Distrustful of others' feelings or intentions, or your own feelings.
- Fearful that no one will believe you. or understand what happened, or that someone will find out.
- Confused about dependency, control and power. Feeling victimized or violated
- Experiencing traumatic symptoms, e.g., anxiety, nightmares, obsessive thoughts, depression, or suicidal or homicidal thoughts

You may even have nightmares, obsessive thoughts, depression, or suicidal or homicidal thoughts. You may feel overwhelmed as you try to decide what to do or whom to tell.

It's essential that you face what happened. This may be painful, but it is the first major step in healing and recovering from the experience. You may have positive and negative feelings at the same time, such as starting to feel personal control, being afraid of what may happen in the future, remembering the experience, and feeling relieved that the sexual relationship is over.

The second step in the healing process is to decide what YOU want to do next. Try to be open-minded about your options.

Remember: **It doesn't matter** if you, the patient, started or wanted the sexual involvement with the therapist. Therapists are responsible for keeping sexual intimacy out of the therapy relationship and are trained to know how to handle a patient's sexual attractions and desires.

## **WHERE TO START**

You may need to (1) talk to someone who will understand what you're going through, (2) get information on whether the therapist's behavior was illegal and/or unethical, and (3) find out what you can do about it. Three places to get help are:

- **Licensing Boards**—In the Department of Consumer Affairs, three different boards license therapists. They can give general information on appropriate behavior for therapists and your rights for reporting what happened, as well as how to file a complaint (see page 13 for licensing board contact information).
- **Sexual Assault/Crisis Centers**—These centers have staff trained in all types of sexual abuse and exploitation. They can provide general information on appropriate behavior for therapists, crisis services, your rights for reporting what happened, and names of therapists and support groups that may be helpful. Centers are located throughout California. Look in your telephone book under “sexual assault center” or “crisis intervention service.”
- **Professional Associations**—Each licensed therapy profession has at least one professional association. Associations can provide general information on appropriate behavior for

therapists, your rights for reporting what happened, and how to file a complaint. They can provide names of therapists who may be helpful (see pages 16–17 for association contact information).

## WHAT YOU CAN DO

You can deal with your situation in several different ways. Take time to explore all of your rights and options. It may help to decide what your goals are:

**Reporting the Therapist** - Perhaps you want to prevent the therapist from hurting other patients. You may want to make it known that sexual exploitation is always wrong. If this is your decision, you have several reporting options (see page 12). What happened to you may be illegal and unethical and you should report it to the appropriate licensing board as soon as possible in order for the board to take appropriate action within the statute of limitations.

It is important to note that reporting misconduct is time sensitive. What can be done in response to the report of misconduct usually depends on who the misconduct is reported to and the length of time between the misconduct and when the report was filed.

Such a time limit is called a "statute of limitations." As you consider your options, be aware of these time limits.

- **Your Recovery** - You may also want to explore and process what happened between you and the therapist. If you decide to do this, you can look into therapy or support groups (see pages 20–21).
- **Moving On** - You may wish simply to move on past this experience as quickly as possible and get on with your life. Remember - you have the right to decide what is best for you.

## YOUR REPORTING OPTIONS

If you decide to report a therapist's behavior that you believe is unethical and illegal, there are four different ways to do so. All of these reporting options are affected by time limits, so you should consider reporting misconduct at the earliest appropriate opportunity. You may choose one or more of the options listed below. These options and their time limits are discussed in more detail on the following pages:

- **Administrative Action** - File a complaint with the therapist's licensing board. (See "More About Administrative Action," page 13.)
- **Professional Association Action** - File a complaint with the ethics committee of the therapist's professional association. (See "More About Professional Association Action," page 15.)
- **Civil Action** - File a civil lawsuit. (See "More About Civil Action," page 18.)
- **Criminal Action** - File a complaint with local law enforcement. (See "More About Criminal Action," page 19.)

### More About Administrative Action

In California, there are four (4) three (3) boards that license and regulate therapists. Three California boards license and regulate therapists:

**Board of Behavioral Sciences**  
1625 N. Market Blvd., Suite S-200  
Sacramento, CA 95834  
(916) 574-7830  
www.bbs.ca.gov



301 This board licenses and regulates licensed educational psychologists; licensed clinical social workers;  
302 registered associate clinical social workers; licensed marriage and family therapists; registered  
303 associate marriage and family therapist-interns; licensed professional clinical counselors; and  
304 registered professional associate professional clinical counselors interns.

305 **Board of Psychology**  
306 2005 Evergreen Street, Suite 1400  
307 Sacramento, CA 95815

308 1625 N. Market Blvd., Suite N-215  
309 Sacramento, CA 95834  
310 (916) 263-2699 (916) 574-7720  
311 www.psychboard.ca.gov www.psychology.ca.gov

312 This board licenses and regulates psychologists, psychological assistants, and registered  
313 psychologists.

314 **Medical Board of California**  
315 2005 Evergreen Street, Suite 1200  
316 Sacramento, CA 95815  
317 (916) 263-2389  
318 www.mbc.ca.gov

319 This board licenses and regulates allopathic (MD) physicians and surgeons, including (psychiatrists)  
320 and research psychoanalysts.

321 **Osteopathic Medical Board of California**  
322 1300 National Drive, Suite 150  
323 Sacramento, CA 95834-1991  
324 (916) 928-8390

325 www.ombc.ca.gov

326 This board licenses and regulates osteopathic (DO) physicians and surgeons (psychiatrists).

327 The purpose of these licensing boards is to protect the health, safety and welfare of consumers.  
328 Licensing boards have the power authority to discipline therapists by using the administrative law  
329 process. ~~Depending on the violation, the board may revoke or suspend a license, and/or place a~~  
330 ~~license on probation with terms and conditions the licensed professional must follow. When a license is~~  
331 ~~revoked, the therapist cannot legally practice.~~

332 ~~In many cases, the California Business and Professions Code requires revocation of a therapist's~~  
333 ~~license or registration whenever sexual misconduct is admitted or proven.~~

334 ~~It is best to report any case of therapist-patient sexual exploitation as soon as possible, since delays~~  
335 ~~may restrict the disciplinary options available to the board. Time limits require a licensing board to~~  
336 ~~initiate disciplinary action by filing an "accusation" against a licensed professional accused of sexual~~  
337 ~~misconduct:~~  
338 ~~– within three years from the date the board discovered the alleged sexual misconduct, or~~  
339 ~~– within 10 years from the date the alleged sexual misconduct occurred.~~

340 ~~That means an accusation of sexual misconduct against a therapist can't be filed more than 10 years~~  
341 ~~after the alleged incident. For complaints involving allegations other than sexual misconduct, the~~  
342 ~~licensing board must file an accusation within seven years from the date of the alleged offense.~~

#### 343 **How to File a the Complaint Process Works**

344 The licensing boards can give you information about the complaint filing process and discuss your  
345 situation with you. To file a complaint, you can request a complaint form, write a letter, or start the  
346 complaint process online with the appropriate licensing board. With your complaint, be sure to include  
347 your name, address, and telephone number; the therapist's name, address, and telephone number; a  
348 description of your complaint; copies of any available documentation (for example, letters, bill receipts,  
349 canceled checks, or pictures); and names, addresses and telephone numbers of any witnesses.

Each complaint is evaluated and investigated, and you and the therapist will be notified if the board has sufficient evidence to initiate disciplinary action. You and the therapist will be interviewed separately.

Most cases are settled by a *stipulated agreement*—the therapist typically admits to the violation(s) and accepts the disciplinary action, no hearing is held, and the patient does not have to testify. In the event that your case is not settled by a stipulated agreement, a hearing will be held by an administrative law judge, and you will be required to testify. When the judge makes a decision about the case, the board will then decide whether to accept this decision or to issue its own decision.

It is board policy to use only initials, rather than full names, to identify patients in public disciplinary documents. However, hearings are open to the public, and there is a possibility that confidentiality may be jeopardized during the investigation process or at the hearing itself. If you are concerned about this, discuss it with the licensing board investigator.

The disciplinary process may take about two years from the time a complaint is received to the time a final decision is made. Sometimes the process takes longer. Keep in mind that you cannot receive monetary compensation from the therapist by using this option, but you may affect the therapist's ability to practice and thereby protect other patients from similar misconduct.

You can submit your complaint online or in writing using the forms on the board's website to start the process. You should provide as much information as possible, but it is especially helpful to provide additional the following information, if available, such as:

- Detailed description of the conduct you are reporting.
- Copies of materials that support your complaint, e.g., e-mails, text messages, correspondence between you and the therapist, photographs or other images you shared with or received from the therapist, etc.

The board will require a signed release form, authorizing the board to obtain your records from the therapist. These records are required for official use, including investigation and possible administrative proceedings regarding any violations of the law. Your complaint will be evaluated, investigated, and you will be notified of the outcome.

The following are possible outcomes of your complaint:

- Revocation or/ surrender of the therapist's license: This results in the loss of license and right to practice.
- Probation: The therapist's license may be placed on probation for a defined period of time, with terms and conditions that must be complied with, in order to continue to practice.
- Case closed and no action taken against the therapist's license: the board could not substantiate a violation of the laws and regulations.

It is board policy to use only initials, rather than full names, to identify clients in public disciplinary documents. However, hearings are open to the public, and you may be asked to testify. All disciplinary actions are public information.

#### **More About Professional Association Action**

Many therapists join professional associations—organizations that provide education and guidance to members of a profession. Each association has ethics guidelines, and all such guidelines state that sexual involvement with patients is unacceptable and unethical.

If your therapist is a member of a professional association, you may file a formal complaint with the association. After investigating the complaint, the association may recommend disciplinary actions that may include removal of the therapist from its membership. Removing a therapist from the association will let other members know about the person's unethical behavior, **but it will not keep the therapist from practicing.** Only a licensing board or court action can do that. In addition, the action will not result in monetary recovery for you (only a civil action can do that), and will not result in criminal action against the therapist.

398 Each association has different ways of filing complaints. Call or write the appropriate association for  
399 this information. To find out which association, if any, the therapist belongs to, call the therapist's office  
400 and request this information; have a friend call the office or therapist for you; or check with the different  
401 associations.

#### 402 **Professional Associations**

403 Most professional association ethics committees will typically review only those complaints that include  
404 allegations made within one year of the date of the alleged misconduct.

405 Contact the appropriate association for specifics on reporting professional misconduct, or to get more  
406 general information.

#### 407 **Psychiatrist, Physician**

408 American Psychiatric Association  
409 1000 Wilson Blvd., Suite 1825  
410 Arlington, VA 22209  
411 (888) 357-7924  
412 [www.psychiatry.org](http://www.psychiatry.org)

413 California Medical Association  
414 1201 J Street, Suite 200  
415 Sacramento, CA 95814  
416 (916) 444-5532  
417 [www.cmanet.org](http://www.cmanet.org)

418 California Psychiatric Association  
419 1029 K Street, Suite 28  
420 Sacramento, CA 95814  
421 (916) 442-5196  
422 [www.calpsych.org](http://www.calpsych.org)

#### 423 **Licensed Psychologist**

424 American Psychological Association  
425 750 First Street, NE  
426 Washington, DC 20002  
427 (800) 374-2721  
428 [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org)

429 California Psychological Association  
430 1231 I Street, Suite 204  
431 Sacramento, CA 95814  
432 (916) 286-7979  
433 [www.epapsych.org](http://www.epapsych.org)

#### 434 **Licensed Clinical Social Worker**

435 National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter  
436 1016 23rd Street  
437 Sacramento, CA 95816  
438 (916) 442-4565  
439 [www.naswde.org](http://www.naswde.org)

440 National Association of Social Workers  
441 750 First Street, NE, Suite 700  
442 Washington, DC 20002  
443 (202) 408-8600  
444 [www.naswde.org](http://www.naswde.org)

445 California Society for Clinical Social Work  
446 6060 Sunrise Vista Drive, Suite 1300  
447 Citrus Heights, CA 95610  
448 (916) 560-9238  
449 [clinicalsocialworksociety.org](http://clinicalsocialworksociety.org)

#### 450 **Licensed Educational Psychologist**

451 California Association of Licensed Educational Psychologists  
452 P.O. Box 387  
453 Aptos, CA 95001  
454 [www.calep.com](http://www.calep.com)

455 California Association of School Psychologists  
456 1020 12th Street, Suite 200  
457 Sacramento, CA 95814  
458 (916) 444-1595  
459 [www.casponline.org](http://www.casponline.org)

#### 460 **Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist**

461 American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
462 112 South Alfred Street  
463 Alexandria, VA 22314-3061  
464 (703) 838-9808  
465 [www.aamft.org](http://www.aamft.org)

466 American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, California Division  
467 Post Office Box 6907  
468 Santa Barbara, CA 93160  
469 (800) 662-2638  
470 (805) 681-1413  
471 [aamftca.org](http://aamftca.org)

472 California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists  
473 7901 Raytheon Road  
474 San Diego, CA 92111  
475 (858) 292-2638  
476 [www.camft.org](http://www.camft.org)

#### 477 **Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors**

478 California Association for Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors  
479 P.O. Box 280640  
480 Northridge, CA 91328  
481 <http://calpcc.org/>

#### 482 **More About Civil Action**

##### 483 **Suing the Therapist or Their Employer**

484 Generally, civil lawsuits are filed to seek money for damages or injuries to a patient. For a sexual  
485 misconduct case, a patient may want to sue the therapist for injuries suffered and for the cost of future  
486 therapy sessions.

487 Under California law, you may file a lawsuit against the therapist or the therapist's employer if you  
488 believe the employer knew or should have known about the therapist's behavior. If the employer is a  
489 local or state public mental health agency for which the therapist works, you must first file a complaint  
490 with the agency within six months of the sexual misconduct. Consult with an attorney for specific  
491 advice.

492 If you think you want to file a lawsuit, it is important to consult an attorney as soon as possible, since  
493 there are different time limits for filing civil lawsuits. Most civil lawsuits must be filed within one year  
494 after the sexual misconduct occurred.

#### 495 **Media Attention**

496 Once a lawsuit is filed, there is the possibility of media coverage, especially if the patient or therapist is  
497 well-known. While many cases are settled out of court, some do go to trial, and it can take years  
498 before your case is tried.

#### 499 **Patients Don't Always Win**

500 You should be aware that some cases end up being decided in favor of the therapist, rather than the  
501 patient.

#### 502 **Finding an Attorney**

503 Take time to choose an attorney to represent you. You may need to interview several. Here are some  
504 points to consider:

- 505 • Get a list of attorneys from your County Bar Association's referral service. You can also check  
506 with your local legal aid society for legal assistance.
- 507 • Contact a lawyer referral service certified by the State Bar of California. To find a certified  
508 lawyer referral service, look in the telephone book yellow pages at the beginning of the  
509 "Attorneys" listings, or visit the State Bar Web site at [www.calbar.ca.gov](http://www.calbar.ca.gov).
- 510 • Check with the State Bar of California ([www.calbar.ca.gov](http://www.calbar.ca.gov)) to make sure the attorney has a  
511 clear license.
- 512 • While some attorneys are willing to wait to be paid based on the outcome of the suit  
513 (contingency basis), some will not.
- 514 • Be sure that the attorney has civil litigation experience in the area of medical and/or  
515 psychological malpractice.
- 516 • Make sure that you feel comfortable with your attorney and can trust and confide in him or  
517 her.

#### 518 **More About Criminal Action**

519 Sexual exploitation of patients by therapists is wrong. The law makes it a crime for a therapist to have  
520 sexual contact with a patient. For a first offense with only one victim, an offender would probably be  
521 charged with a misdemeanor. For this charge, the penalty may be a sentence of up to one year in  
522 county jail, or up to \$1,000 in fines, or both. Second and following offenses, or offenses with more than  
523 one victim, may be misdemeanors or felonies. The penalty in such felony cases can be up to three  
524 years in prison, or up to \$10,000 in fines, or both.

525 This law applies to two situations:

- 526 • The therapist has sexual contact with a patient during therapy, or
- 527 • The therapist ends therapy primarily to start having sexual contact with the patient (unless the  
528 therapist has referred the patient to an independent and objective therapist who has been  
529 recommended by a third-party therapist).

530 To file a criminal complaint against a therapist:

- 531 • Contact your local law enforcement agency. Many agencies in larger cities have sexual  
532 assault units that handle these complaints.
- 533 • Contact your local victim/witness assistance program for help through the legal process. Look  
534 in your local telephone book under "District Attorney" or call 1-800-VICTIMS (842-8467).

Once a complaint is filed, it will be investigated by the law enforcement agency, which will give the results of the investigation to the district attorney's office. The district attorney's office will decide whether there is enough evidence to file criminal charges.

Time limits, or statutes of limitations, affect this reporting option. If you are considering this option, contact your local law enforcement agency. The agency's authority to take action may expire as soon as one year from the date the alleged misconduct occurred.

## WHERE TO GET HELP

Many patients who have been sexually exploited by therapists find it difficult to see another therapist for help and support. However, for most people, the issues that brought them to therapy were never worked on or resolved, and the sexual exploitation created even more issues to handle. If this is your situation, therapy may be an important tool in your healing process.

Therapy may be an important tool in your recovery. Before selecting a new therapist, here are a few considerations/suggestions to support that process: interview several until you find one you are comfortable with. Use the "Patient Bill of Rights" as a guide (see page 24). If you are unsure after one session, either consider a different therapist or set up a follow-up session to clarify your concerns. Do not feel pressured to stay with one therapist.

### Finding a Therapist

Some ways of finding a therapist are:

- Asking someone you know and trust for a referral, who has been in therapy, who feels good about the experience and who has changed in ways you consider positive.
- Calling your local sexual assault center or crisis intervention service (in the telephone book yellow pages). These centers can refer you to therapists experienced in dealing with those who have suffered sexual exploitation or abuse.
- Calling professional associations (see pages 16-17) and asking for referrals to therapists who specialize in helping those who have been sexually abused or exploited by therapists.
- Searching online for a local sexual assault center or crisis intervention service. These centers can refer you to therapists experienced in dealing with those who have suffered sexual misconduct by a therapist.
- Contacting professional associations and asking for referrals to therapists who specialize in helping those who have suffered sexual misconduct by a therapist.
- Seeking a referral from your primary care physician or insurance provider.

After getting several names, call the appropriate licensing board (see page 13) or visit their Web site for on-line license verification and disciplinary actions. You can also call the professional association (see pages 16-17) and ask if the therapists are licensed and if any disciplinary actions have been filed against them. Check with your county Superior Court to see if there is a record of any malpractice lawsuits filed against the therapists. Visit the board's website to verify the status of the therapist's license.

### Self-Help Support Groups

There is an informal network of self-help support groups throughout California. While there might not be a group in your area specifically focused on sexual exploitation by therapists, there may be groups dealing with more general kinds of sexual abuse. To find out if there are any groups in your area, call your local sexual assault center or crisis intervention service (listed in the telephone book yellow pages).

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

579 • **Is it normal to feel attracted to my therapist?**

580 Yes. It is normal to feel attracted to someone who is attentive, kind, and caring. This is a  
581 common reaction toward someone who is helping you. However, all therapists are trained to  
582 be aware of this and to maintain a professional therapy relationship that is beneficial to the  
583 patient/client.  
584

585 • **What if I was the one who brought up having sex the client initiated sexual behavior?**

586 That doesn't matter. The therapist is the one who is responsible for keeping ensuring that  
587 sexual intimacy behavior or contact is not part out of therapy.  
588

589 • **Does this happen a lot?**

590 A national study revealed that probably fewer than 10 percent of all therapists have had  
591 sexual contact with their patients and that 80 percent of the sexual-exploiting therapists have  
592 exploited more than one patient. If a therapist is sexually exploiting a patient, they have  
593 probably done so before and are likely to do so again. In recent years, aggressive prosecution  
594 of offending therapists and passage of laws that facilitate the enforcement work of licensing  
595 boards have helped to significantly reduce the number of such cases reported to the licensing  
596 boards.

597 • **Why do some therapists sexually exploit their patients?**

598 There are probably as many excuses as there are therapists who engage in such  
599 unprofessional conduct. But no excuse is acceptable for a therapist to abuse the therapeutic  
600 relationship and the trust of a patient for the therapist's own sexual gain. All therapists should  
601 know that this conduct is unethical and illegal.

602 • **Why do I feel scared or confused about reporting my therapist?**

603 In most cases, the therapist is an important person in the client's life. Therefore, feelings of  
604 such as fear, confusion, protectiveness, shame or guilt are common. Get as much information  
605 as possible about your options. Keep in mind that you are in control and can choose what to  
606 do.  
607

608 • **What if the therapist retaliates against me, harasses me or files a lawsuit against me for reporting him or her?**

609 Retaliation against a patient or harassment of a patient is illegal. Contact your local district  
610 attorney. If the therapist files a lawsuit against you, you will be required to defend yourself in  
611 the lawsuit. However, the law does provide immunity from monetary liability for reporting  
612 misconduct to a licensing board.  
613

614 • **How can I prevent this from happening again?**

- 615 1. Acknowledge your right to be free from sexual exploitation.
- 616 2. When choosing a therapist, check with the licensing board (see page 13) to see if the  
617 therapist is licensed and if the license is under suspension or probation. Check on any  
618 complaints filed with a professional association. Review county Superior Court records to  
619 see if any malpractice lawsuit judgments are on file against the therapist.
- 620 3. Question any action that may seem sexual.
- 621 4. Remember that feelings of attraction are natural, therapy is supposed to be a means to  
622 explore and resolve feelings, without having to act them out.
- 623 5. Feel free to end a relationship that no longer seems safe.

624 • **Can I file a complaint if there is or has been a civil case between myself and the therapist?**

626 Yes, you may file a complaint at any time, whether the case is ongoing or concluded. A civil  
627 settlement cannot preclude you from filing a complaint against a licensee.

628 • Is there a cost associated with filing a complaint?

629 No, filing a complaint is free and can be filed via telephone, email, mail, or online.

630 • Can I file a complaint if I had a personal relationship with my therapist?

631 Yes.

632 • Can I contact the therapist after I file a complaint?

633 In order to preserve the integrity of the investigation, it is strongly recommended that you do  
634 not initiate contact with the therapist once you have filed a complaint.

635 • What if the therapist contacts me after I file a complaint?

636 Once you have filed a complaint, notify the board right away if the therapist contacts you.

637 **Can I file an anonymous complaint with a licensing board?**

638 Anonymous complaints are accepted, but they are almost impossible to investigate without the  
639 cooperation of the accuser.

640

## 641 **PATIENT BILL OF RIGHTS**

642 **Patients have the right to:**

- 643 • Request and receive information about the therapist's professional capabilities, including  
644 licensure, education, training, experience, professional association membership,  
645 specialization and limitations.
- 646 • Have written information about fees, payment methods, insurance reimbursement, number of  
647 sessions, substitutions (in cases of vacation and emergencies), and cancellation policies  
648 before beginning therapy.
- 649 • Receive respectful treatment that will be helpful to you.
- 650 • A safe environment, free from sexual, physical and emotional abuse.
- 651 • Ask questions about your therapy.
- 652 • Refuse to answer any question or disclose any information you choose not to reveal.
- 653 • Request and receive information from the therapist about your progress.
- 654 • Know the limits of confidentiality and the circumstances in which a therapist is legally required  
655 to disclose information to others.
- 656 • Know if there are supervisors, consultants, students, or others with whom your therapist will  
657 discuss your case.
- 658 • Refuse a particular type of treatment, or end treatment without obligation or harassment.
- 659 • Refuse electronic recording (but you may request it if you wish).
- 660 • Request and (in most cases) receive a summary of your file, including the diagnosis, your  
661 progress, and the type of treatment.
- 662 • Report unethical and illegal behavior by a therapist (see "Your Reporting Options," page 12).
- 663 • Receive a second opinion at any time about your therapy or therapist's methods.
- 664 • Have a copy of your file transferred to any therapist or agency you choose.



665

666

667 Publishing Information

668 The 2018 edition of "Therapy Never Includes Sexual Behavior" is published by the California  
669 Department of Consumer Affairs. This publication is a joint project of the California Board of  
670 Psychology, the California Board of Behavioral Sciences, the Medical Board of California, the  
671 Osteopathic Medical Board of California, and the Department of Consumer Affairs' Office of  
672 Publications, Design & Editing.

673 This publication, and its previous versions, are the result of the dedicated work of former Senator  
674 Diane Watson, whose Senate Task Force on Psychotherapist and Patient Sexual Relations prompted  
675 the development of the original "Professional Therapy Never Includes Sex" brochure in 1990.

676 This booklet is available in the "Publications" section of the Department of Consumer Affairs' website  
677 at [www.dca.ca.gov](http://www.dca.ca.gov).

678 Single copies of the publication are available at no charge from the boards listed above and from  
679 Publications Office, California Department of Consumer Affairs, P.O. Box 989004, West Sacramento,  
680 CA 95798-0004.

681 This booklet may be copied, if (1) the meaning of copied text is not changed or misrepresented, (2)  
682 credit is given to the California Department of Consumer Affairs, and (3) all copies are distributed free  
683 of charge.

684