

## MEDICAL BOARD STAFF REPORT

DATE REPORT ISSUED: January 14, 2019  
ATTENTION: Members, Medical Board of California  
SUBJECT: Therapy Never Includes Sexual Behavior Brochure  
STAFF CONTACT: Kimberly Kirchmeyer, Executive Director

### REQUESTED ACTION:

Review the revised brochure and provide any edits to it and then make a motion to approve the brochure for publication, with a delegation for staff to make technical edits as needed to finalize the document.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION:

Over the last year, Board staff has had several meetings with the Board of Psychology, the Board of Behavioral Sciences, and the Osteopathic Medical Board of California regarding a complete revision of the brochure previously entitled "Professional Therapy Never Includes Sex." In addition, based upon these discussions, AB 2968 (Levine, Chapter 778) was passed last year regarding this brochure. This bill updated and modernized the information in the brochure for victims of psychotherapist-patient sexual impropriety. The law, effective January 1, 2019, also requires the Board (and other Department of Consumer Affairs boards) to disseminate the brochure.

The attached document contains all of the proposed changes to the brochure. The Board has previously provided input on the brochure, however, a few additional edits have been made to comply with changes in the law and to incorporate changes from other boards. Changes not previously approved by the Board appear in color and require your review and consideration.

- 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**

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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-State of California. Additionally, with regard to former clients, sexual contact within two years  
 15 after 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 website at [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.

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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

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79

80 INTRODUCTION

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

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

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

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

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

107

108 DEFINITION OF TERMS

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

- 112 • ~~Psychiatrists (physicians practicing psychotherapy)~~ Physicians and Surgeons (Ppsychiatrists)
- 113 • Psychologists
- 114 • Registered pPsychologists
- 115 • Psychological iInterns
- 116 • Psychological aAssistants
- 117 • Licensed eClinical eSocial wWorkers
- 118 • Registered aAssociate eClinical eSocial wWorkers
- 119 • Licensed mMarriage and fFamily tTherapists
- 120 • Registered Associate Mmarriage MMarriage and F-family tTherapists ~~registered interns and~~
- 121 ~~trainees~~
- 122 • Licensed pProfessional eClinical eCounselors
- 123 • Registered Associate PpProfessional eClinical eCounselors Interns
- 124 • Licensed Educational Psychologists
- 125 • Registered Research Psychoanalysts

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

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

133 According to California laws:

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

## 153 **CLIENT RIGHTS**

### 154 You, as a Client, have the right to:

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

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

**WARNING SIGNS**

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

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

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

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

198 ~~Signs of inappropriate behavior and misuse of power include:~~

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

241 **WHERE TO START**

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

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

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

259 **WHAT YOU CAN DO**

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

262 **Reporting the Therapist** - Perhaps you want to prevent the therapist from hurting other patients. You  
 263 may want to make it known that sexual exploitation is always wrong. If this is your decision, you have  
 264 several reporting options (see page 12). What happened to you may be illegal and unethical and you  
 265 should report it to the appropriate licensing board as soon as possible in order for the board to take  
 266 appropriate action within the statute of limitations.  
 267

268 It is important to note that reporting misconduct is time sensitive. What can be done in response to the  
 269 report of misconduct usually depends on who the misconduct is reported to and the length of time  
 270 between the misconduct and when the report was filed.  
 271

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

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

279

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

- 285 ● ~~**Administrative Action**~~ - File a complaint with the therapist's licensing board. (See "More  
 286 About Administrative Action, page 13.)
- 287 ● ~~**Professional Association Action**~~ - File a complaint with the ethics committee of the  
 288 therapist's professional association. (See "More About Professional Association Action," page  
 289 15.)
- 290 ● ~~**Civil Action**~~ - File a civil lawsuit. (See "More About Civil Action," page 18.)
- 291 ● ~~**Criminal Action**~~ - File a complaint with local law enforcement. (See "More About Criminal  
 292 Action, page 19.)

293 **More About Administrative Action**

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

296 **Board of Behavioral Sciences**  
 297 1625 N. Market Blvd., Suite S-200  
 298 Sacramento, CA 95834  
 299 (916) 574-7830  
 300 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.govwww.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.~~

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

377 The following are possible outcomes of your complaint:

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

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

387 In addition to filing a complaint with the appropriate regulatory board, you may also have civil remedies  
 388 and criminal recourse/legal remedies available to you in regard to this incident.

389 **More About Professional Association Action**

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

393 If your therapist is a member of a professional association, you may file a formal complaint with the  
 394 association. After investigating the complaint, the association may recommend disciplinary actions that  
 395 may include removal of the therapist from its membership. Removing a therapist from the association  
 396 will let other members know about the person's unethical behavior, **but it will not keep the therapist**

397 ~~from practicing. Only a licensing board or court action can do that. In addition, the action will not~~  
 398 ~~result in monetary recovery for you (only a civil action can do that), and will not result in criminal action~~  
 399 ~~against the therapist.~~

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

404 **Professional Associations**

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

407 ~~Contact the appropriate association for specifics on reporting professional misconduct, or to get more~~  
 408 ~~general information.~~

409 **Psychiatrist, Physician**

410 ~~American Psychiatric Association~~  
 411 ~~1000 Wilson Blvd. Suite 1825~~  
 412 ~~Arlington, VA 22209~~  
 413 ~~(888) 357-7924~~  
 414 ~~www.psychiatry.org~~

415 ~~California Medical Association~~  
 416 ~~1201 J Street, Suite 200~~  
 417 ~~Sacramento, CA 95814~~  
 418 ~~(916) 444-5532~~  
 419 ~~www.emanet.org~~

420 ~~California Psychiatric Association~~  
 421 ~~1029 K Street, Suite 28~~  
 422 ~~Sacramento, CA 95814~~  
 423 ~~(916) 442-5196~~  
 424 ~~www.calpsych.org~~

425 **Licensed Psychologist**

426 ~~American Psychological Association~~  
 427 ~~750 First Street, NE~~  
 428 ~~Washington, DC 20002~~  
 429 ~~(800) 374-2721~~  
 430 ~~www.apa.org~~

431 ~~California Psychological Association~~  
 432 ~~1231 I Street, Suite 204~~  
 433 ~~Sacramento, CA 95814~~  
 434 ~~(916) 286-7979~~  
 435 ~~www.cpapsych.org~~

436 **Licensed Clinical Social Worker**

437 ~~National Association of Social Workers, California Chapter~~  
 438 ~~1016 23rd Street~~  
 439 ~~Sacramento CA 95816~~  
 440 ~~(916) 442-4565~~  
 441 ~~www.naswdc.org~~

442 ~~National Association of Social Workers~~  
 443 ~~750 First Street, NE, Suite 700~~

444 Washington, DC 20002  
 445 (202) 408-8600  
 446 [www.naswdc.org](http://www.naswdc.org)

447 California Society for Clinical Social Work  
 448 6060 Sunrise Vista Drive, Suite 1300  
 449 Citrus Heights, CA 95610  
 450 (916) 560-9238  
 451 [clinicalsocialworksociety.org](http://clinicalsocialworksociety.org)

452 **Licensed Educational Psychologist**

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

457 California Association of School Psychologists  
 458 1020 12th Street, Suite 200  
 459 Sacramento, CA 95814  
 460 (916) 444-1595  
 461 [www.casponline.org](http://www.casponline.org)

462 **Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist**

463 American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy  
 464 112 South Alfred Street  
 465 Alexandria, VA 22314-3064  
 466 (703) 838-9808  
 467 [www.aamft.org](http://www.aamft.org)

468 American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy, California Division  
 469 Post Office Box 6907  
 470 Santa Barbara, CA 93160  
 471 (800) 662-2638  
 472 (805) 681-1413  
 473 [aamftca.org](http://aamftca.org)

474 California Association of Marriage and Family Therapists  
 475 7901 Raytheon Road  
 476 San Diego, CA 92111  
 477 (858) 292-2638  
 478 [www.camft.org](http://www.camft.org)

479 **Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors**

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

484 **More About Civil Action**

485 **Suing the Therapist or Their Employer**

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

489 Under California law, you may file a lawsuit against the therapist or the therapist's employer if you  
 490 believe the employer knew or should have known about the therapist's behavior. If the employer is a

491 local or state public mental health agency for which the therapist works, you must first file a complaint  
 492 with the agency within six months of the sexual misconduct. Consult with an attorney for specific  
 493 advice.

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

497 **Media Attention**

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

501 **Patients Don't Always Win**

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

504 **Finding an Attorney**

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

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

520 **More About Criminal Action**

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

527 This law applies to two situations:

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

532 To file a criminal complaint against a therapist:

- 533 ● Contact your local law enforcement agency. Many agencies in larger cities have sexual  
 534 assault units that handle these complaints.

- 535 • Contact your local victim/witness assistance program for help through the legal process. Look  
536 in your local telephone book under "District Attorney" or call 1-800-VICTIMS (842-8467).

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

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

## 543 WHERE TO GET HELP

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

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

### 553 Finding a Therapist

554 Some ways of finding a therapist are:

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

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

### 574 Self-Help Support Groups

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

580 **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

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

582 Yes. It is normal to feel attracted to someone who is attentive, kind, and caring. This is a  
 583 common reaction toward someone who is helping you. However, all therapists are trained to  
 584 be aware of this and to maintain a professional therapy relationship that is beneficial to the  
 585 patient/client.  
 586

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

588 That ~~doesn't matter~~. The therapist is the one who is responsible for keeping ensuring that  
 589 sexual intimacy behavior or contact is not part out of therapy.  
 590

591 • ~~Does this happen a lot?~~

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

599 • ~~Why do some therapists sexually exploit their patients?~~

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

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

605 In most cases, the therapist is an important person in the client's life. Therefore, Ffeelings of  
 606 such as fear, confusion, protectiveness, shame or guilt are common. Get as much information  
 607 as possible about your options. Keep in mind that you are in control and can choose what to  
 608 do.  
 609

610 • ~~What if the therapist retaliates against me, harasses me or files a lawsuit against me for~~  
 611 ~~reporting him or her?~~

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

616 • ~~How can I prevent this from happening again?~~

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

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

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

- 630 • **Is there a cost associated with filing a complaint?**

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

- 632 • **Can I file a complaint if I had a personal relationship with my therapist?**

633 Yes.

- 634 • **Can I contact the therapist after I file a complaint?**

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

- 637 • **What if the therapist contacts me after I file a complaint?**

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

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

640 ~~Anonymous complaints are accepted, but they are almost impossible to investigate without the~~  
641 ~~cooperation of the accuser.~~

642

643 **PATIENT BILL OF RIGHTS**

644 **Patients have the right to:**

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



- 664 • ~~Report unethical and illegal behavior by a therapist (see "Your Reporting Options," page 12).~~
- 665 • ~~Receive a second opinion at any time about your therapy or therapist's methods.~~
- 666 • ~~Have a copy of your file transferred to any therapist or agency you choose.~~

667

668

669 Publishing Information

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