

Ten Things That You Wish You Had Known When You First Started Your Therapy Practice

- 1. Find a Good Office space: with a good Landlord** – You might be judged by patients according to their first impressions. It's important to have a 'nice', warm comfy but professional space, and (if applicable) a landlord who understands the 'business' needs of therapists: absolute quiet, no interruptions, etc.
- 2. Start with Clients that are 'Good Matches'** – Don't just take any clients who come along. Some of them may be quite high risk or needy: and such clients can drain you, at least until you have sufficient clinical experience and sufficient emotional resilience: both of which are needed for such clients. It may be well worth while being cautiously selective – especially at first.
- 3. Charge What You're Worth** – Charge what it costs you and what you really need. Make sure that you have factored in all your expenses (including holidays, pension payments, CPD, etc.) and then divide that by the number of sessions you can realistically work in that time period. If you have extra income at the end of that period, only then can it go towards subsidizing low-cost sessions or doing "pro bono" work.
- 4. Have Boundaries to your Schedule** – Flexibility is fine, but long hours, burn-out, getting ill, or suffering inconvenience is not. There are times when you need to be totally clear of work, be able to 'switch off', be your own person: Get a Life. It is OK for clients to fit in to your schedule, which is true for all professionals: but 'being there' professionally in a session also needs to be on your terms: it needs to work for you, as well as for them.
- 5. Learn to Manage your Self** – If you are anxious, needy, stressed, tired, over-loaded, distressed, depressed, in a hurry, etc. – this will inevitably affect your ability to help your clients. Use all the stress-management and self-soothing techniques that you have learnt ... on yourself – before you suggest them for your clients. The Golden Rule of Being a Carer is ... 'Look After Yourself', so that you can continue looking after others. Lack of self-care is the biggest risk you face.
- 6. Create a Community for Yourself** – As you are a working professional, you will need to meet with other similar professionals – at seminars, conferences, CPD events, etc.; but also, socially & within your own locale. Don't just have a supervisor and your own therapist, etc.; find a peer-group; meet with fellow practitioners; go to local area meetings; etc. – and maybe these are not just from within the therapy world.
- 7. Ensure that you have proper Professional Support Systems** – This includes professional mal-practice insurance; licence to practice; professional registration; local authority business rates; membership of professional association(s); a business accountant; tax advice; professional mentoring, etc. All of these are – at some point in time – not just important, but also necessary. You may have to 'demonstrate' that you are "in business" properly.
- 8. Don't Take a Client's 'Rejection' to Heart** – Not all clients stay with their therapist for a long time. The model of therapy that you were trained in is not necessarily what actually works in practice. A percentage of clients always drop out quite soon after starting; a small percentage continue for a good long time; most of the rest have a number of sessions somewhere in between.
- 9. Keep Good Records and Statistics** – You are required to maintain 'proper' records: find out what. It is also worthwhile: doing some "outcome research"; having client-feedback sheets or satisfaction-questionnaires; using post-therapy feed-back forms; ... essentially discovering what works for your clients – and then doing it. This is (perhaps) the only way to improve.
- 10. Enjoy Your Work** – This is the most important factor of all. If you stop enjoying it, stop doing it!