

Alabama Board of Examiners in Counseling (ABEC)

Clarifications on Direct Service in Supervised Experience

Preface

The ABEC has recently encountered multiple instances of confusion on the part of Supervised Counselors (SCs) and Associate Licensed Counselors (ALCs) concerning those activities that represent “direct service” to clients. This White Paper is intended to offer clarification based on the shared perceptions of the ABEC concerning direct service activities.

As with any process of this type, exceptions must be considered. The time for considering those exceptions is at the point when the Proposed Plan of Supervision (PPOS) is submitted to the ABEC. The PPOS is submitted to the ABEC for a qualified applicant to be licensed as an ALC under supervision by an SC. The PPOS is the basis for approval of the SC-ALC relationship for supervised experience.

The specific exceptions requested by an ALC and SC should be provided *in a narrative description within the Proposed Plan of Supervision (PPOS)*. Exceptions to the descriptions noted in the present document will be considered by the ABEC prior to the approval of the PPOS. *In the absence of an approved exception from the PPOS*, the ABEC will employ the following framework for acceptable direct service within the SC-ALC relationship.

Relevant Definitions from the ABEC Administrative Code

255-X-2-.01 Practice Of Counseling

- (1) Unless specifically exempt by Code of Ala. 1975, §34-8A-3, no person shall engage in the private practice of counseling in the state of Alabama without a valid license issued through due process by the Alabama Board of Examiners in Counseling.
- (2) The private practice of counseling shall mean rendering or offering to render to individuals, groups, organizations, or the general public counseling services in settings of individual or group practice, for a fee, salary, or other compensation, involving the application of principles, methods or procedures of the counseling profession which include, but are not restricted to:
 - (a) COUNSELING. To render evaluation and therapy that includes, but is not limited to, providing individual counseling, family counseling, marital counseling, group therapy, school

counseling, play therapy, rehabilitation counseling, art therapy, human growth and development counseling, couples counseling, chemical abuse or dependency counseling, career counseling, and vocational disability counseling. The use of specific methods, techniques, or modalities within the practice of a Licensed Professional Counselor is restricted to counselors appropriately trained in the use of these methods, techniques, or modalities. A licensed professional counselor or associate licensed counselor may diagnose and develop treatment plans but shall not attempt to diagnose, prescribe for, treat, or advise a client with reference to problems or complaints falling outside the boundaries of counseling services.

(b) APPRAISAL ACTIVITIES. Selecting, administering, scoring and interpreting instruments designed to assess an individual's aptitudes, attitudes, abilities, achievements, interests and personal characteristics, but shall not include the use of projective techniques in the assessment of personality.

(c) COUNSELING, GUIDANCE AND PERSONNEL CONSULTING. Interpreting or reporting upon scientific fact or theory in counseling, guidance and personnel services to provide assistance in solving some current or potential problems of individuals, groups, or organizations.

(d) REFERRAL ACTIVITIES. The evaluating of data to identify problems and to determine advisability of referral to other specialists.

(e) RESEARCH ACTIVITIES. The designing, conducting and interpreting of research with human subjects.

255-X-2-.13 Indirect Counseling Service - Activities concerning client care that do not qualify as direct service. In general, the term is used to refer to time spent in management, administration, or other aspects of counseling service ancillary to direct service.

255-X-2-.14 Direct Counseling Service - Interaction with clients that includes the application of counseling, consultation, or human development skills. In general, the term is used to refer to time spent interacting with clients.

Relevant Issues from the ABEC Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice

255-X-11

A.3. CLIENT RIGHTS

a. Informed Consent and Disclosure to Clients. When counseling is initiated, and throughout the counseling process as necessary, licensed professional counselors inform clients of the purposes, goals, techniques, procedures, limitations, potential risks and benefits of services to be performed, and other pertinent information. Such disclosures to clients are mandatory and must

be provided in both verbal and written form to insure clients are fully informed and consent to the terms of the counseling relationship. Licensed professional counselors take steps to ensure that clients understand the implications of diagnosis, the intended use of tests and reports, fees, and billing arrangements including collection procedures to be employed in circumstances of nonpayment of fees. Clients have the right to expect confidentiality and to be provided with an explanation of its limitations, including supervision, consultations, and/or treatment team professionals; to obtain clear information about their case records, including their retention and destruction; to participate in the ongoing counseling plans; and to refuse any recommended services and be advised of the consequences of such refusal. Informed consent is an ongoing collaborative process throughout the counseling relationship.

A.11. TERMINATION, REFERRAL, AND INTERRUPTION OF SERVICES

b. Inability to Assist Clients. If licensed professional counselors determine an inability to be of professional assistance to clients, they avoid entering or continuing the counseling relationship and immediately terminate with appropriate referral a counseling relationship once this inability is determined. Licensed professional counselors are knowledgeable about referral resources and suggest appropriate alternatives. If clients decline the suggested referral, licensed professional counselors should discontinue the relationship.

c. Appropriate Termination. Licensed professional counselors terminate a counseling relationship, securing client agreement when possible, when it is reasonably clear that the client is no longer benefiting, when services are no longer required, when counseling no longer serves the client's needs or interests, when clients do not pay fees charged, or when agency or institution limits do not allow provision of further counseling services. Clients are considered to be abandoned by a licensed professional counselor if their termination is without notice and referral when termination is based solely on nonpayment of fees for counseling services.

Clarifying Board Interpretations:

1. Indirect service is an essential function of client care but indirect service is not direct client care.
2. Direct client care is direct service.
3. Direct service involves interaction with clients who: (a) have established counseling goals through informed consent (unless otherwise unable to provide consent), (b) have agreed to those goals, and (c) have the right to discontinue the pursuit of those goals.
4. Direct service to clients should be monitored carefully by licensees to insure clients are benefitting from the pursuit of those goals. Licensees should consider terminating direct service in the counseling relationship when: (a) it is clear a client is no longer benefitting, (b) direct service is no longer required, (c) those services no longer serve a client's needs, (d) a client does not pay fees, or (e) agency/institutional limits authorizing direct service have been met.

5. Direct service may involve the client and counselor as well as others (e.g., family members, peer professionals) so long as the focus of the interaction is on goals established for the counseling relationship.
6. Direct service most typically involves an established starting and ending time for the interaction between client and counselor devoted to goals established for the counseling relationship. Crisis counseling is a unique form of direct service that differs from typical scheduled sessions.
7. Direct service can occur in real-time face-to-face or online virtual environment (NOTE: licensure by the ABEC to engage in the private practice of counseling is only for practice in the State of Alabama).
8. Direct service can occur in a variety of formats ranging from individual sessions to multiple-generation or extended-family sessions.
9. Direct service may be defined by agencies, organizations, or policies on the basis of “billable hours.” However, “billable hours” which fail to comply with the interpretations in the present document **cannot** be accrued as direct service hours for purposes of licensure by the ABEC.
10. “Direct service hours” are calculated based on *time* rather than based on *number of clients* (e.g., one hour of group counseling with 8 clients is *one hour* rather than *eight hours* of direct service).

Acceptable Forms of Direct Service to Clients:

1. Scheduled face-to-face sessions with clients in various traditional modalities (e.g., individual, couple, family, group,).
2. Scheduled sessions with clients in virtual environments (NOTE: licensure by the ABEC to engage in the private practice of counseling is only for practice in the State of Alabama).
3. Crisis intervention with a current client (utilizing SC input as soon as reasonably possible).
4. Crisis intervention with a person who is not a current client (utilizing SC input as soon as reasonably possible).
5. Disaster intervention (utilizing SC input as soon as reasonably possible).
6. Unscheduled sessions with clients as part of a comprehensive treatment program or guidance program that sustains the *established individual counseling goals* of that client. Enforcing established behavioral norms for a *group setting* is **not** considered direct service, since such activities may be enacted by professional and non-professional staff in the setting.

*Unacceptable Forms of Direct Service to Clients:

1. Travel to/from work, supervision, or in-home counseling with clients.
2. Documentation, case-note preparation, filing, electronic data entry, or other methodologies of summarizing direct service with clients.
3. Case management, scheduling, referrals, or other forms of administration.
4. Child care, disciplinary oversight, socializing, or other forms of protection or care for minors, particularly in residential settings.
5. Field trips or other off-site activities with clients unless scheduled client sessions are a part of such activities.
6. Organizing, summarizing, or preparing documents for distribution to clients, court, or others in relation to client care.
7. Test scoring, interpretation, or report-writing related to client assessments.
8. Staffing a crisis hot-line or remaining on call awaiting a contact from a person in need of crisis response (responding to a client crisis IS direct service).
9. Opportunistic interactions with an inpatient/residential client who neither sought nor scheduled a session and is not in an active state of crisis.
10. Simply being in the presence of a client in an inpatient/residential setting.

*Acceptable as “indirect service” activities by the ABEC