

Clinic for Boundaries Studies

Options for people surviving abuse by professionals

We recommend that you consult with a knowledgeable person about which options are best for you. The Clinic for Boundaries Studies can provide free advice, within the limits of a one hour initial conversation. Another option is to talk to an experienced lawyer or advocate.

We also recommend reading up on the issue (you may wish to consult our reading list), and checking internet resources such as therapyabuse.org and advocateweb.org.

We have used the word 'report' rather than 'complaint' in most instances, as it may be that you prefer to have the issue dealt with without using a formal complaints process.

We are using the term 'abuse' to include behaviour which amounts to a serious breach of trust by anyone in a professional role towards their client, patient or congregant. This includes violations of professional boundaries such as sexual contact, psychological, physical or financial abuse. This can relate to a wide range of professionals, including health workers, social workers, clergy, complementary therapists etc.

1. Request a processing session with the practitioner (with a qualified mediator)

This option may not be appropriate if the events are very close in time. Many people find that processing sessions are more productive once they have had a chance to move on a little.

2. Seek redress through legal action

Good lawyers will take you through the whole range of options; going down the legal route can result in the reimbursement of any fees paid and in awards for damages and loss of earnings.

3. Make a report to a regulator or a professional association

It is important to check whether the practitioners is subject to statutory or voluntary regulation. Statutory regulators such as the GMC or HPC can take on investigation and prosecution responsibilities; with voluntary regulation (such as BACP) the person reporting is responsible.

4. Make a report to the employing agency

Depending on the nature of the issue you can make a formal complaint to an employer (such as an NHS trust or church hierarchy) using established complaints procedures.

5. Report to the police (where applicable)

In some cases sexual contact between mental health workers and their clients is a criminal offence even where there is apparent consent. In all cases where there is no consent to sexual contact then a crime has been committed. If you think this may

Clinic for Boundaries Studies

apply in your case you should check with an advisor and consider reporting to the police; most areas now have officers trained in working with victims of sexual assault. Details on the law can be found [here](#).

6. See a therapist

Seeking therapy is a personal decision and may be very difficult when there has been a severe breach of trust. However therapy can be a very useful aid to recovery when it is provided by a therapist who is knowledgeable about the dynamics of abuse and is comfortable in working with you. As always it is important that you feel safe with the therapist and some people benefit from talking to more than one possible therapists before going ahead.

7. Seek compensation from the Criminal Injuries Compensation Authority (where applicable)

CICA can provide compensation for people who have been physically or mentally injured as a result of a crime. They can provide compensation for injuries and for loss of earnings and special expenses. Their website provides full details (www.cica.gov.uk).

8. Concentrate on recovery without taking any other actions

Some people decide that the best way forward is to deal with the issues themselves and to move ahead without taking any action. Each decision is a personal one and only you can decide what is right for you.

Clinic for Boundaries Studies
January 2011

Sources used in compiling this document

Luepker, E. in Psychotherapists Sexual Involvement with Clients (1989)
therapyabuse.org
advocateweb.org