
Guidelines for dealing with problems arising from a failed IEMT session

Practitioner Guidelines



“When a Session Goes Badly.”

All practitioners must be prepared to be able to deal with difficult situations that can arise from the activity of working with other human beings in therapeutic settings.

Problems arise for two reasons: issues brought into the session by the client and/or issues brought into the session by the practitioner.

We must be realistic in understanding that there will always be those individuals for whom things are going to go bad regardless as that is their will, no matter who the therapist is or what the modality of treatment on offer. Anyone working with the public on a regular basis will be familiar with this. Thankfully however, this is the tiny minority of clients self presenting for psychotherapy.

When faced with a situation of a “bad session” it is the practitioners responsibility to deal with both the aftermath for the client and the aftermath for themselves. Such situations can be difficult to manage for oneself both psychologically and emotionally and a “thick skin” and advice from The Association for IEMT Practitioners may be appropriate.

Most sessions will fail simply because of the naivety and inexperience of the practitioner, and it is important to understand that such a situation can arise at any time in a professional career when we can be faced with new or unexpected situations.

So, obviously it goes without saying that if you are worried about a particular client before you book them in for an appointment, you may wish to consider if you and/or the client would be better off not having the session at all.

Most problems arise owing to expectations not being met. It is important to check the clients expectations of the session prior to booking the appointment and this can be achieved simply by having a question on the assessment form that says, “What are your expectations of the session and of what will happen?” and/or “What is it that you expect me (the therapist) to do?”

Most people have an idea of what therapy should look and feel like, how they as a client should behave when in the company of a therapist and of what therapy can achieve. However, for many people these ideas have no basis in reality at all and may be drawn from movie and cultural representations.

It should be remembered that there are many therapists of all disciplines marketing themselves in a manner that contributes to the problematic cultural expectations of therapy and therapists. Thus a client may arrive to you having been given a set of expectations directly or indirectly by another therapist.

It has been learned that no matter how much a person pays for a session, if you offer a free token (i.e. an audio recording, follow up email or whatever) and then don't deliver the free token, the client will feel cheated, no matter what the comparative or relative value of that token. The person won't complain about the cost of the session, but they will always complain when they don't get their free gift.

When a person refuses to pay for a session for whatever reason they may give, it is probably the easiest course of action to simply accept this at face value rather than try to argue for your fee. Insisting on your fee will likely trigger an escalation as the aggrieved client attempts to "save face." The consideration to have is the comparative value of maintaining a good reputation (especially in the internet age of social media) versus your pride/dignity plus the fee.

Accept the fact that such situations are embarrassing, humiliating and awkward. Get used to it, it doesn't happen often and should be regarded as a rare occupational hazard.

If you screw up, say something inappropriate that you wish you hadn't said, get something very wrong and so on, it is easier to admit to it as soon as you realise. Most of the time a client may not notice what you have actually done in terms of the specifics, but they may well notice that things aren't going so well. An open and honest attitude about being human is useful to have and is appreciated by most people. Remember: *humility will save you from humiliation.*

In the vast majority of instances, clients are simply too polite to tell you that you have either screwed up or are simply not very good at what you do. Often it takes someone who doesn't actually like or appreciate you to tell you the truth about your work, so it is important to listen to your disgruntled client. Don't take it too personally, in the long term you'll get over it and hopefully will improve with experience.

The vast majority of people who say, "I'm going to sue you" never do. The majority of those who then go and see a lawyer will discover that they have no legal case. In the UK, a case against you needs the following to be established before it can go to court:

1. You owed a duty of care to the plaintiff.
2. You breached that duty of care.
3. As a result of that breach in the duty of care, the plaintiff has suffered a loss.

If you are concerned that there is likely to be a case against you, then in the first instance you must talk to your insurance company for advice. It is advisable to contact the Association for IEMT Practitioners to inform them also.

Be aware, that your professional duties in terms of confidentiality and maintaining dignity of the client do not change just because that client is suing you. So all your communication about the matter must demonstrate the highest standard of

professionalism, no matter how badly or strongly you feel about the situation. Do not give into the temptation to gossip about your client with anyone, or make attention seeking or passive-aggressive posts on social media about the subject.

If the client also writes things on social media and attempts to draw you into a public debate or argument, do not offer any response whatsoever. Take a screen shot of all that is posted and keep all correspondence, but do not post any reply or engage with any other participants in the public conversation.

Being sued by a client involves a very steep learning curve in maintaining public dignity, state control and getting a good night's sleep by turning off that incessant internal chatter about the matter. It's rarely a comfortable situation, but you will deal with it. After all, you don't have a choice in that.

Your insurance company are the best people to advise you on how to proceed.

If in doubt, contact The Association for further advice.