

Avoiding Ethical Complaints: Self-Care, Consultation, and Supervision

By Karen W. Edelstein, Psy.D., Chair

In professional psychology, there is increasing recognition that one's physical, psychological and social well being, along with the finest in training and experience, are fundamental to competent, responsible practice.

Self-care, the means by which psychologists care for themselves, is now seen as a positive mandate for psychologists. Continuing education programs, conferences, and the professional literature tout psychologist's self-care as a meaningful way in which to enhance clinical practice and to avoid ethical and legal pitfalls.

The physically healthy, emotionally satisfied, socially engaged, well-trained psychologist is thought to be best positioned to offer services that meet ethical and legal guidelines.

A noteworthy number of complaints that come before the State Board of Psychology are embedded in the personal problems of the treating psychologist. Often, factors intended to mitigate discipline delineate the psychologist's own mental state and life status and their impacts on the course of treatment.

The psychologist who confuses his or her life needs with those of the patient is more prone to boundary violations. For example, in the midst of a relationship crisis, the psychologist might take solace in confessions to a patient; this level of personal intimacy is a red flag, which might easily segue into a personal relationship in the guise of therapy.

One might juxtapose this emotionally vulnerable psychologist with the individual who strives on an ongoing basis to engage in practices that maximize personal and professional well-being. Many of these are unique and individualistic in nature and might involve a choice between yoga or weight training, relaxation techniques or attendance at religious services, reading or watching a movie, a walk in the country or an urban

hike. However, for all of us, regular consultation and supervision with other professionals is an unparalleled mechanism of self-care.

The nature of complaints that come before the board is striking, and the dearth of consultation and supervision is more striking still. The psychologist who consistently makes the effort to collaborate with other professionals and review therapeutic strategies has the opportunity to address ineffective strategies, as well as the common link between the practice of therapy and the person of the psychologist.

Our varying patient rosters, diversity among patients, and the psychologists' own constellation of characteristics and life issues only begin to suggest the multiple, dynamic and complex challenges inherent in each psychologist-patient relationship. Along with basic self-care, consultation and supervision have the potential to be effective antidotes to the types of failings which lead to discipline by the board.

Accommodations for Candidates with Disabilities

By Patricia M. Bricklin, Ph.D.

Although few in number, there are persons with disabilities who may need accommodations when taking the required examinations for licensure (the Examination for Professional Practice in Psychology (EPPP) and, in Pennsylvania, the Pennsylvania Psychology Law Examination.

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Other News:

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- [PA Becomes Smoke-Free](#)

There are also a number of licensed psychologists who evaluate individuals to determine the presence of a disability and the kinds of accommodations that are needed. Licensing boards in Pennsylvania and elsewhere comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) to ensure equal opportunity for all qualified applicants with disabilities.

Disabilities, according to the ADA, limit one or more of the major life activities: walking, hearing, speaking, seeing, reading or writing. Accommodations for taking the licensing exams must maintain the psychometric nature and security of the examinations. Any modification that would fundamentally alter the nature or security of the exam is not permitted. Nevertheless, a number of accommodations are available for those who need them.

An applicant seeking accommodations for the examinations must submit a written request and have a clinical evaluator send a letter and/or report verifying the disability, supporting documentation and the needed accommodations. The clinical evaluator must be a licensed psychologist or certified school psychologist, physician, or educator with competence in the disability.

The letter or report should describe the extent of the disability, the criteria for the diagnosis, and the recommended accommodations. Recent documentation should define the extent and impact of the impairment(s) upon the **current** levels of academic and physical functioning. The licensing board will make the final decision based on the material submitted.

In the past seven years there have been seven accommodations approved by the board. Examples are additional time, a separate testing area, paper and pencil and audiotape exams. The additional time varies depending on need. The disabilities included attention deficit disorder, reading disability, dyslexia, hearing loss, paralysis of extremities and blindness.

One young man, who is totally blind, is one of a very few blind persons, nationally, who has taken the EPPP exam and passed. He has given us permission to identify him because he is eager to communicate to other young blind persons, who may want to be psychologists, that with hard work it is possible.

He also wants to communicate to graduate psychology programs that investment in a blind student who wants to be a psychologist can have positive results.

Approving accommodations for those with current disabilities is a small but very important part of the board functioning that is not often discussed. We hope this article will be helpful to others.

If you have questions about accommodations for the exam, based on disabilities, please write to the State Board of Psychology, P.O. Box 2649, Harrisburg, PA 17105-2649.

Board Meeting Dates

- April 27-28, Harrisburg
- June 17-18, Harrisburg
- July 27-28, Harrisburg
- Sept. 14-15, Harrisburg
- Oct. 19-20, Harrisburg
- Nov. 30-Dec. 1, Harrisburg

Please contact the board office at (717) 783-7155 for specific location information. A monthly [board meeting schedule](#) is also available.

The State Board of Psychology consists of the Commissioner of Professional and Occupational Affairs, two members representing the public, and six licensed psychologists who have been practicing psychology. All professional and public members are appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of a majority of the members elected to the Senate.

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