

# Dual Relationships

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CPY 545  
Legal, Professional, and Ethical Issues in Counseling

## Professional & Non-Professional Relationships

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# Blurred Boundaries

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**Professional / Non-Professional Relationships**  
Confusion of the roles, duties, and responsibilities of professional verses non-professional relationships

- **Exploitation**
- **Loss of Objectivity**
- **Potential for Misunderstanding**
- **Breach of Confidentiality**
- **Conflict of Interest**

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# Rings of Familiarity/Intimacy

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**Dual Roles**

"Royal Road" to Liability Problems

Ethical Codes do not forbid all dual roles.

Ethical Codes caution against dual roles.

Some practice settings inevitably involve dual roles.

Counselors in all settings should know how to manage dual roles.

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**Dual Roles**

Management of the Dual Roles...  
Is the Responsibility of the Counselor

Most Dual Role Problems...  
Start out Well-Intended but Become Problematic

Sexual / Romantic Relationships  
Consequences: Licensure, Civil and Criminal

Weigh Benefit vs. Harm

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**DECISION-MAKING CONSIDERATIONS**  
When presented with a dual role decision

1. **DETERMINE:** Is the dual relationship avoidable or unavoidable?
2. **ASSESS:** What are the potential benefits and risks?
3. **CONSULT:** Objective perspective of a supervisor or trusted colleague.
4. **DECIDE:** IF AVOIDABLE, or the risks outweigh the benefits:  
Decline the secondary relationship and/or assist the person to obtain counseling elsewhere.  
IF UNAVOIDABLE, or the benefits outweigh the risks:  
Agree to the secondary relationship.
5. **IMPLEMENT:** Define the boundaries of both relationships. Discuss how you and your client can work to maintain clear boundaries. Record in chart.
6. **CONSULT & SELF MONITOR:** Engage in regular supervision or colleague consultation to ensure that the dual relationship remains clean.

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When does a client stop being a client?

How do we know?

Sharing events with active clients

What does it mean to the client if you attend?

What does it mean if you decline to attend?

Gifts

Cultural and Relationship Content

What does it mean to the client if you accept?

What does it mean to the client if you decline?

Contact with clients outside the office

Ground rules

If possible, work it out in advance

Dual Role Management is all about Boundaries

Both counselor and client must respect boundaries

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## Ethical Decision Making

1. Identify the problem or dilemma
2. Identify the potential issues involved
3. Review the relevant ethics codes
4. Know the applicable laws, regulations, or policies
5. Obtain consultation
6. Consider possible and probable courses of action
7. Enumerate the consequences of various decisions
8. Decide on what appears to be the best course of action

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## Case Discussion

**Karen Jones**, Licensed Marriage & Family Therapist, has a thriving private practice in a large metropolitan community. She has been treating Ken & Joanna Brown for marital problems. The husband is a surgeon, the wife a homemaker. The couple has been in therapy for almost a year. Among many issues, a central theme in this marriage is the impact of Ken's controlling behavior. He seems unwilling or unable to recognize and take responsibility for his behavior. The counselor has been working very hard to help Joanna (wife) become strong enough to deliver a clear message about the impact of Ken's controlling behavior on her and the quality of the marriage. The counselor has been working equally hard to help Ken (husband) become open enough to really hear and respect the reality of Joanna's message.

For the past six months, the counselor has also been treating another client, Joan for depression. One of the issues that Joan has discussed involves trauma she experienced following complications from a surgical procedure nearly two years ago. Several months after beginning therapy, Joan reached a decision – she would consult an attorney and bring suit against the doctor who performed the surgery.

Today, an attorney representing Joan contacted the counselor. The attorney advised the counselor that he would be calling her to schedule a deposition regarding her evaluation of the emotional consequences resulting from the surgery. The attorney mentioned the name of the surgeon...Dr. Ken Brown.

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