

Client Relationship Management



As sex workers, we are in professional relationships with clients. Most of the time it is healthy and mutually beneficial to both parties. However, sometimes a relationship may cross the line and become problematic. This fact sheet will look at what a professional relationship is, the different roles you may perform for a client, how to manage them and what to do if it goes wrong.

What are you going to be reading about?...

- Professional relationships
- Maintaining a professional distance
- Reasons clients may become difficult to manage
- Client confusion
- Disclosing information
- Warning signs the relationship is becoming unprofessional
- Managing a relationship that is becoming unprofessional
- Points to remember

Professional relationships

The most important thing to remember in any relationship you have with a client is that it is essentially a professional relationship, i.e. one where a client expects someone to provide them with a service and is paying for that service.

We will often take on different roles within this professional relationship at different times depending on the client and their needs. Common roles include counsellor, lover, confidant, fuck doll, mentor, friend, careers adviser, debriefer and tour guide.

A real life partner may also perform all of these roles; the difference is that a sex worker uses boundaries to maintain a professional distance and does not take on any of these roles personally.

We might care, but we are paid to care. When we don't care, we are paid to pretend that we do.

Maintaining a professional distance

Many sex workers use boundaries to maintain a professional distance from our clients just as counsellors and doctors do. Our boundaries may be financial, physical, emotional and mental barriers that we put in place to keep us safe.

In a booking we may hear disturbing information from a client, but if we take it personally and are unable to let the information and feelings that it may bring up in us, so then we are at risk of being manipulated, burning out or compromising ourselves in some way.

You can tell if you're not maintaining your boundaries and the relationship is at risk of becoming unprofessional or personal if you find yourself doing things like:

- wanting to cry or get violent in bookings
- doing things you don't want to do, like bareback sex, when you wouldn't normally
- telling a client your real name if it's not your standard practice
- not being able to stop thinking about them when they walk out the door

It is one thing to personally relate to what a client tells you, it is another thing if it makes you react in some way you normally wouldn't and in a way you don't have control over.

If you find your boundaries have been compromised, you can try re-directing your client, and if that doesn't work consider not seeing them again. It is often cheaper to lose a client than pay the price of not being able to maintain a professional distance.

“Create physical and emotional boundaries to maintain a professional distance from your clients”

We cannot tell you what to do anymore than a client can. We can only suggest and give you food for thought. If you are confused, it can help to talk it through with someone who will help you find your own solutions.

Reasons clients may become difficult to manage

It helps us to manage relationships with our clients if we understand the reasons why a client may become difficult to manage. Reasons can include:

- They enjoy playing games with workers.
- They think they have boring lives and want to make them more interesting.
- They may not have seen a sex worker, or many sex workers, before and confuse our professional skills with love.
- They may want to fall in love and look for a sex worker to do that with.
- They may think that because they are paying that they can behave in ways that would not be normally considered acceptable in real relationships.
- They may want to try and get free bookings and believe if they develop a personal or intimate relationship with a worker that they will achieve that.

There are many reasons a client may not respect or even know about appropriate behaviour with a sex worker. If we try to maintain our boundaries and, if possible, assist a client to respect these boundaries both our bookings with that client and other workers' bookings will be much easier.

Client confusion

As sex workers, we are aware of the different roles we perform for our clients; however, clients may not be aware, or may not want to admit to themselves, that these are roles. Our main role is usually to act as a lover for our clients, and if you consider that as professionals we usually want to do our job well and have happy clients, a client can forget that they are engaging with us in a

professional relationship and may try and push the boundaries for more. It can be difficult for clients to understand that just because we enjoy, or appear to enjoy, spending time with them it does not mean that we wish to be their friend or partner.

Clients can also believe that we want to pursue a personal relationship if we disclose personal information about ourselves. In real life, when we want to make friends we tell people about ourselves.

By doing this in a booking, if we don't make our boundaries clear to a client, it can lead to stalking or clients believing they are in love with us and that we want to pursue a personal relationship with them. That does not mean that sexual harassment or stalking is acceptable and there are legal remedies available. Please refer to the fact sheet on stalking.

“Understanding why the client became difficult to manage, can help you find the solution”

Disclosing information

Part of everyday interaction in making and developing relationships involves divulging personal information to other people. Our job is to connect with our clients to make them comfortable, so we may encourage or allow them to tell us about themselves and their lives and we may do the same.

When disclosing personal information it's important to be careful what you tell a client because it can always be used against you if he turns into a stalker. If it sounds too personal and you say it in a way that makes them think you are sharing information with a lover, they can convince themselves they are your lover and not your client.

It's also important to be aware of what a client is disclosing and the effect it may have on you. For example, some workers won't want to hear about the sex life (or lack thereof) a client has with their

real life partner. If they then take out their phone or wallet to show you happy family pictures, this could be enough to destroy the sex worker/client relationship.

If you find a client beginning to disclose information you don't wish to hear, simply redirect the conversation to another area. If they keep going back to something you don't want to hear, you can always make them aware they are crossing the line and pushing the boundaries of the relationship.

Watching the nightly news or reading the local paper can provide you with something to talk about that is not too personal.

Warning signs the relationship is becoming unprofessional

There are lots of signs that tell you the client no longer sees the relationship as purely professional, for example:

- The client calls or texts you constantly in between bookings.
- The client drops into your workplace to say hello without making a booking.
- The client sends you gifts or turns up with flowers when they haven't made a booking.
- The client approaches you outside your work location and tries to engage you in conversation.
- The client tells you that they love you.
- The client suggests you stop working and/or they want to set you up in an apartment or business.
- The client discloses very personal information.
- The client won't leave on time and you have trouble getting them to leave.
- You think about the client in between bookings and start to dread the thought of a booking.
- You get a gut feeling something is wrong and the client makes you feel uncomfortable.
- The client is stalking you.

A client will generally do a combination of things that may make you feel uncomfortable. They may not be aware their behaviour is inappropriate, so it's important to discuss with them as soon as

possible what they are doing, how it's making you feel and the consequences if they are unable to stop what they're doing.

Managing a relationship that is becoming unprofessional

The most important thing to know is it's not your fault. We are not responsible for other people's feelings, and even if you're clear with your client that you don't want to pursue a personal relationship some clients will still continue to push your boundaries and cross that line.

There are strategies we can put in place to handle these situations to make the client aware of their behaviour, pull the client back into line or terminate the relationship.

You can let a client know their behaviour is inappropriate and unwelcome if you feel confident and safe talking to them.

They may not realise that their behaviour is inappropriate and may not realise that it is making you feel uncomfortable. When talking to a client, it helps to give them specific examples of where they crossed the line and offer suggestions of what they can do to express themselves without making you feel uncomfortable, for example:

- "I love that you wanted to bring me flowers, but it makes me feel uncomfortable if you just turn up on my doorstep with flowers when you don't have a booking. I'd really appreciate it if you only bring me flowers when we have a booking."
- "I know that we have brilliant conversations, but it makes me feel weird when you talk to me about how much you love your partner and send me pictures of your family picnics. Please don't do it anymore otherwise I'll have to get cranky at you."

When talking to a client who's crossed the line, it's important to be very clear with them.

When clients have convinced themselves that they have feelings for you, or are playing games with you, they can interpret what you say in a way you don't intend.

For example, if a client believes they are in love with you, it is really tempting to point out to them how someone would be the luckiest person in the world to be with them, but unfortunately that can't be you because you need to remain a sex worker to achieve your goals.

A client may interpret this as you think they are wonderful and would have a relationship with them if you weren't a sex worker, so all they need to do is save you or wear you down until you stop sex working.

If you're unable to redirect your client or don't feel safe and confident enough to talk to them, it may mean you need to stop seeing that client.

To do this you can either tell them you don't feel comfortable doing bookings with them anymore, or when they call for a booking tell them you're busy so you're unable to see them.

“Look out for the warning signs your clients are no longer seeing you as a professional”

Points to remember

- If we keep professional boundaries, it is not our fault if clients become unmanageable. We are not responsible for other people's feelings.
- It is up to you to decide where you want your boundaries with clients to be. You might try to 'play them' to keep them coming back and get them spending money on you, but be aware that if you are too convincing your client may well believe you are selling more than a service.
- Keep a record of the behaviour of clients who are becoming problematic so that you can monitor any escalations. These records may also be useful if they begin stalking you and you need to apply for a restraining order.
- You have the right to end any booking or relationship with a client if they become unmanageable and you don't owe anyone any explanation of why you are doing this.

- Try and be as clear as possible with clients as soon as an issue arises so as to try and pull your client back into line so you can continue your professional relationship.
- If a client is unable to respect the boundaries you put in place, then it can be better not to see that client again rather than have the client's behaviour escalate into stalking.

Disclaimer:

All material in this fact sheet is provided for your information only and may not be construed as legal, medical or health advice or instruction.

Respect Inc contacts:

Brisbane Office

28 Mein Street
Spring Hill QLD 4000
07 3835 1111 (phone)
07 3835 1122 (fax)

Gold Coast

4 Bay Street
Southport QLD 4215
07 5657 0857 (phone)
07 5564 0929 (fax)

Cairns Office

7/24 Florence Street
Cairns City QLD 4870
07 4051 5009 (phone)
07 4051 0009 (fax)

Townsville Office

118a Charters Towers Road
Hermit Park Townsville QLD 4812
07 4724 4853 (phone)
07 4724 1122 (fax)

www.respectqld.org.au
info@respectqld.org.au