



► Scenario 10

Email correspondence

As an occupational therapist working in a vocational rehabilitation program, you have several job coaches who help you to implement the occupational therapy programs you develop with clients. These job coaches are not regulated health professionals.

In keeping with technology and modern methods of communication, your setting has established a practice of having clients e-mail weekly updates when they are on work experience placements. These e-mails are sent directly to the job coaches, and typically contain information as to the number of hours the client has worked, key tasks they have completed, and identification of any problems or issues they require assistance with. If problems or issues arise, it is the job coach's responsibility to notify you, and then the two of you, along with the client, get together to develop strategies to address the problems. Basically, you operate on a "no news is good news" assumption, knowing that if there is a problem, the job coach will let you know.

Such a situation has just happened, and a job coach has approached you to request a meeting to discuss the problems that one client has been encountering in her work placement. You've scheduled a meeting with the job coach and the client, and in order to begin to prepare for that meeting, you've asked the job coach to forward you the e-mail correspondence he has had with the client so you can get a sense of what's been going on.

Upon reviewing the e-mails between the job coach and the client, you are alarmed to find that in addition to communication about the work placement, the job coach and client have been sending each other jokes and amusing articles, and the e-mail conversations often digress from issues related to the placement. Some of the jokes that have been going back and forth are quite racy, and a couple of times the messages from the client seem to express a certain amount of discomfort or even disgust with what she has received from the job coach. The job coach has also provided feedback to the client about what she should wear to work, which is not unusual, but in providing this feedback, he has commented on how good the client looks in certain outfits, how she should style her hair, and on one occasion even commented that she consider wearing underwear that wouldn't make visible lines in her clothing.

You immediately discuss your concerns with the job coach, but he responds in a very unconcerned manner, and says, "You're over-reacting and that's just the way we talk to one another. She's totally fine with it."

Some Warning Signs/Risk Factors

Job coach's understanding of professional boundaries differs from OT's.

Supervision of job coach may not be adequate (no news is good news).

Client expresses discomfort in email.



Work Sheet

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STEP ONE

Identify the risk factors under each area:

- Client's Vulnerability _____

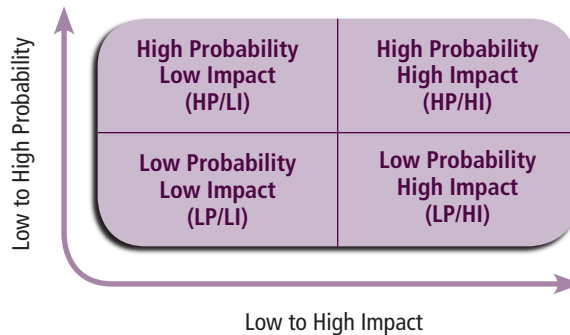
- Therapeutic Relationship _____

- Practice Setting _____

- Therapist's Skills and Knowledge Level _____

STEP TWO

Given the risk factors, categorize the risk:



STEP THREE

Ways to Mitigate the Risk

Review the professional boundaries listed under each of the *Essential Competencies* (pages 5-9) in *Drawing the Line: Guidelines for Establishing Professional Boundaries to Prevent Sexual Misconduct*, to identify the strategies that would help you to prevent sexual misconduct in this scenario.

1. Assumes Professional Responsibility _____

2. Demonstrates Practice Knowledge _____

3. Utilizes a Practice Process _____

4. Thinks Critically _____

5. Communicates Effectively _____

6. Engages in Professional Development _____

7. Manages the Practice Environment _____
