



Dual Relationships / Multiple Relationships *in Supervision*

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Working with two people who know each other within the same community always creates a layered situation. It's not automatically wrong—especially in smaller or tightly connected settings—but it does mean things can get complicated quickly. We're no longer just holding one therapeutic relationship; we're holding a network of relationships, and that needs to be handled with care.

At the centre of this is the simple question: *is this helping, or is it quietly creating harm?*

do no harm:

First, there's the issue of *not doing harm*. We have to be honest about whether seeing both people could lead to unintended consequences—emotionally, socially, even relationally within the wider community. It also means being very careful not to slip into using what we know from one person in a way that influences how we see or respond to the other. Once our objectivity starts to blur, the work is compromised.

acting in the supervisee's best interest:

Then there's *acting in the client's best interest*. That sounds obvious, but in practice it can mean making uncomfortable calls—like referring one of them on. The question isn't "can I manage this?" but "is this actually in their best interest, or am I trying to make it work because it's convenient or familiar?" It's important that we check our motives and make sure we are continuing the relationship because it's best for the supervisee, rather than best for us.

confidentiality:

Confidentiality becomes much more fragile in these situations. Even if we say nothing, people notice tone, body language, small slips. Perhaps we are seen in public with one or other of our supervisee's and assumptions are made about what 'may have been shared'. We have to be disciplined—not just about what we share, but about what might be inferred or assumed. And that needs to be named clearly from the outset. Both people deserve to understand the risks before anything gets underway.

boundaries:

Boundaries also need to be tighter than usual. Not rigid for the sake of it, but clear enough that there's no confusion about the role we're in. If the relationship extends beyond the therapy room in any way—socially, professionally, online—we're asking for things to blur.

fairness:

There's also the matter of *fairness*. We can't afford to be even subtly pulled toward one person's narrative over the other's. If we're not actively checking ourselves here, bias creeps in quietly. We may not even be aware of it until it's too late.

honesty & transparency:

And underpinning all of this is *honesty and transparency*. If something shifts or overlaps in a way we didn't anticipate, we need to name it. Don't sidestep it or hope it settles. These situations don't resolve themselves—they need to be worked with openly.

document your decision & reasoning:

Finally, we need to *document our decisions and reasoning*, because this is exactly the kind of situation where clarity matters later. It shows that we were aware of the overlap, considered it, weighed and discerned all the aspects listed above and made an informed decision to proceed. It can also show why we perhaps felt it was ethically appropriate to step back and refer.

The bottom line is this: just because we feel we CAN hold both relationships doesn't mean we SHOULD. The test is whether the work remains clean, fair, and genuinely in service of the people in front of you

