

Tough Conversations Sticky Situations

Each of these scenarios is rooted in real-world clinical experiences — the kind that catch us off guard, test our boundaries, and call for both compassion and clarity. Use this guide to explore possible responses, rehearse your language, and reflect on what you'd do next time.

Sticky Situations

- 1 **My Client Arrives Intoxicated-** You suspect substance use — slurred speech, erratic behavior, or an outright admission. You're unsure how to proceed while maintaining safety, professionalism, and rapport.

- 2 **My Client Asks If I've Ever Used Drugs-** A familiar question — often posed mid-session. It may be curious, confrontational, or a test of connection. How you respond matters.

- 3 **My Client Insists on Smoking During Session-** You're working with a client actively using nicotine or cannabis. They expect to continue mid-session — virtually or in person. Boundaries and harm reduction are suddenly on the table.

- 4 **My Adolescent Client Refuses Parental Consent-** Your younger client wants to talk — but doesn't want their parents involved. You're caught between ethical nuance and legal obligations.

- 5 **My Client Refuses Inpatient Treatment but Still Wants to Meet -** They've been assessed for a higher level of care, but they're declining. They still want to work with you — and you're wondering how to honor autonomy while managing clinical risk.

Use the reflection space to consider your comfort, boundaries, and supervision questions. This is not about having perfect answers — it's about being prepared when the moment comes.

Tough Conversations Reflection Guide

Supervision Prompts | Self-Journaling | Peer Prep

1. What scenario challenged you the most — and why?

What emotions did it bring up?

Was there uncertainty, hesitation, or fear?

2. How would you phrase your response in that moment?

Draft your own version of the script. Try writing a version that's more "you."

3. What support or policy clarification might you need?

Is this something to bring to supervision or team discussion?

4. How prepared do you feel for this kind of situation? What would help move you one step up?

(1 = not at all, 5 = totally prepared)

5. Action Step: One thing I'll do this week to feel more confident in ethical "gray zones" is _____