

# DISCLOSURE

## Format

### 1. Introduction and Orientation [5 minutes]

The group leader provides a brief *explanation of the aim of the session*, emphasising that there is no predetermined outcome other than that having gone through the process, individuals will have explored sufficient material, articulated all relevant conflicting imperatives and had opportunity to consider such a range of positions to draw their own conclusions.

A short *vignette* illustrating a “disclosure” situation or dilemma is presented by the leader. This is intended to orient the group towards the key issues and to prompt discussion.

### 2. Types of Disclosure [10 minutes]

The group is prompted to *brain-storm* a broad range of situations and types of disclosure. These will include a mixture of real-life examples from individuals’ experience and hypothetical situations.

### 3. Categorisation [5 minutes]

The group attempts to group these examples in some systematic manner according to common characteristics. The group is encouraged to make these commonalities explicit, thus creating a *simple classificatory framework* and beginning the identification of *underlying theological and ethical dimensions*.

### 4. Question Sequence [30 minutes]

Further discussion is prompted by the *sequence of questions*. Some of these questions will be informed by access to *resources* (handouts, relevant texts, journal articles, professional guidelines, biblical references, etc.) which the workshop leader will make available to individuals or the group as a whole as the discussion progresses. There may be breaks in the discussion while group members read or examine resource materials.

### 5. Closure [10 minutes]

Individual group members summarise the particular issues that they have identified as pertinent to themselves and report any conclusions they have drawn or positions they have adopted as a result, avoiding further discussion by the group as a whole.

## Vignettes

### *Vignette 1*

Peter is a clinical psychologist working in primary care: he sees many of his clients in a local, inner city GP's surgery and is employed by an NHS mental health trust. During an early therapy session one of his clients, Mrs Smith, reveals that she is a Christian and that she feels her depression has its roots in spiritual issues. Peter, privately, has concerns about the senior GP's view of his clinical work and avoids revealing his own Christian commitment partly for fear that the client will give an account of their session to her family doctor.

### *Vignette 2*

Jane is a lecturer in a university psychology department. She overhears one of her senior colleagues criticising and making fun of an overtly Christian student. She feels she ought to defend the student but is worried about the effect on staff perceptions of herself and her career prospects in the Department. She stays silent but feels guilty subsequently.

### *Vignette 3*

John is an undergraduate psychology student in his first year. During a seminar on Kohlberg's theory of moral development he describes the development of his own moral awareness and the impact of becoming a Christian at the age of 13. This provokes embarrassment in some of his fellow students and a degree of hostility in others. The tutor attempts to reframe John's experiences within a secular theory of moral development.

### *Vignette 4*

Julie is a counsellor working in a GP health centre. She takes every opportunity to talk about her faith with clients and to explain the Gospel. One of the GPs receives a complaint from one of his patients, accusing her of "Bible-bashing". Julie is sacked from her job with the practice following an investigation.

# EXPLICIT DISCLOSURE OF PERSONAL CHRISTIAN FAITH/BELIEF IN SECULAR PSYCHOLOGY CONTEXTS

*Read through one or more vignettes*

## Situations in which disclosure may occur

*Brainstorm situations in which self-disclosure may occur, e.g.:*

Student perspective: peers (other students); university staff.  
Professional psychologist perspective: staff; professional meetings; patients/clients.

## Types of disclosure content

[Christian values]  
[Moral stance/moral objection/standing against majority view]  
[Explicit scriptural position]  
Personal Christian commitment  
Gospel/direct evangelism

*Groups or individuals may wish to decide which of these categories most apply to them, and focus on these in what follows.*

## Questions for discussion/personal reflection

*The following questions have been designed to aid group discussion or personal reflection. Although an attempt has been made to place these in a logical sequence, groups or individuals may wish to vary the order or omit items depending on their needs. There are no right or wrong answers. The intention is to provoke thought and ultimately perhaps, some degree of personal (if not consensual) resolution having considered the issues in some detail.*

1. To what extent do you think you should be prepared to self-disclose? As a committed Christian, do you have the option to choose whether or not to self-disclose? [Theological position]
2. Are there power asymmetry issues? Why are these important?

3. What professional and national frameworks/guidance are relevant and how do they apply?
4. What consequences of disclosure might there be? (positive and negative)
5. What fears do you have about disclosure? Why? Are they justified?
6. Can you think of any instances where you have listened to the disclosures of others and found them either embarrassing or inappropriate? Why did they appear so? How did this affect your subsequent regard for the person?
7. What perceptions might people have of me as a result of disclosure?

## **Underlying issues**

Having responded to the above questions, what do you think are the underlying issues or principles governing whether a person discloses their faith in a secular context? [brainstorm issues]

## **Conclusion**

Can you now articulate under what circumstances you would discuss your faith, and why?

Range of positions:

Take every opportunity to disclose versus never disclose in secular contexts (continuum)

## **Resources**

### *Scriptural imperative*

Matthew 5:13-16; 10:27-28; Luke 9:26; 12:8-9  
Matthew 28:19-20; Luke 9:1-2; John 14:6

### *Professional Guidance*

A Code of Conduct for Psychologists, BPS 1999  
-especially sections 5.3 and 5.4

Professional Practice Guidelines. Division of Clinical Psychology, BPS 1995  
-especially section 2 "Personal Conduct"

British Association of Counselling Code of Conduct

*N.B. I have contacted both the AUT and NUS national offices and neither appears to have any guidelines or policy documents which might include disclosure and/or religious discrimination issues. MW*

### *Papers*

Older, J.

Letter from New Zealand: religious fundamentalism in medical school  
British Medical Journal 1984, Vol. 289(6455): 1359-1360

*This is a provocative (hostile) article from a non-Christian psychology lecturer teaching medical students on his experience of attempts by some Christian students to convert him.*

Nelson, A., Wilson, W.

The ethics of sharing religious faith in psychotherapy  
Journal of Psychology and Theology 1984 Vol. 12(1): 15-23

Bergin, Allen E.

Neglect of the therapist and the human dimensions of change: A commentary.  
Clinical Psychology: Science and Practice 1997 Spr; Vol. 4(1): 83-89

*Bergin is a Mormon and a well-known American psychotherapist. He has been very influential in the US in moving the psychotherapy scene away from the myth of therapist-neutrality towards explicit recognition of therapist values and beliefs.*

Bergin, Allen E.; Ellis, Albert

Should psychotherapy include religious values?

In Slife, Brent & Rubinstein, Joseph (Eds); *et al.* (1992). Taking sides: Clashing views on controversial psychological issues (7th ed.). (pp. 286-301). Guilford, CT, USA: Dushkin Publishing Group

*Bergin and Ellis (founder of Rational Emotive Therapy and hostile critic of Christian faith) argue about the role of therapist values in psychotherapy.*

Williams, D., Irving, J.

Keep the faith

Counselling News, December 1996:8-10

*Two non-Christian academics and counsellor-trainers argue the case for counsellors to be explicit about their religious beliefs.*

Payne, I. Reed; Bergin, Allen E.; Loftus, Patricia E.

A review of attempts to integrate spiritual and standard psychotherapy techniques.  
Journal of Psychotherapy Integration 1992 Sep; Vol. 2(3): 171-192

Bergin, Allen E.; Payne, I. Reed

Proposed agenda for a spiritual strategy in personality and psychotherapy.  
Journal of Psychology and Christianity 1991 Fal; Vol. 10(3): 197-210

Moon, Gary W.

Homesick for Eden

Servant Publications, 1997.

Michael Wang and Val Baxter

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