



## Considerations When Discontinuing Services

**Question:** I have been working with a client of mine for over two years now. Their progress in therapy has plateaued, and after carefully reviewing their file, I don't believe that I have the competencies required to provide safe, effective, and quality services for their communication goals, and I'm not sure they would benefit from continuing therapy with me. This client and I have great rapport, and I anticipate that discontinuing services with me is going to be very upsetting to them. Ethically, am I allowed to discontinue services with a client who still needs therapy?

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Ideally, services end when treatment goals are met, and when there is mutual agreement between the client and the clinician that services should stop. Early, unplanned, or unexpected termination of services may turn into a challenging experience for the professional and the client, if not handled with care.

The decision to withdraw professional services should not be made without good reason. There are several legitimate reasons for discontinuing services, including situations where:

- The professional lacks the necessary competencies to continue working with the client,
- The professional is leaving a practice to pursue other opportunities,
- The professional is relocating or closing their practice,
- The professional believes the client will not benefit from continued services,
- The client is non-compliant with their treatment plan,
- The benefits of concurrent services no longer outweigh the risks, as per the College's [Concurrent Practice guideline](#), and
- The funding for services for the client is no longer available, or the client has stopped providing payment for services.

While there is nothing inherently unethical in terminating services for the above reasons, discontinuing services in such situations may result in the client being left without appropriate care. Termination of services should be appropriately planned to ensure that the process is safe and ethical. The ethical principles and values outlined in the College's [Code of Ethics](#) require that regulated members behave in ways that benefit the health and well-being of their clients, and practice with the intent of minimizing potential harm that could occur, even when discontinuing services.

ACSLPA regulated members are expected to conduct themselves professionally during the termination of services with a client. According to ACSLPA's Standards of Practice, [Standard 1.3 Client Assessment and Intervention](#), when discontinuing services, regulated members have an obligation to:

- Counsel, educate, and facilitate the client's or their caregiver's participation in the care post-discharge,
- Implement discharge planning which may include referral to other health care providers and/or education for clients and clients' caregivers, and
- Advocate for clients as appropriate to obtain required resources and services post-discharge.

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### Considerations When Discontinuing Services - continued

To ensure a safe and ethical service discontinuation process, regulated members should also consider:

- Having a discussion with the client about the decision to discontinue services, including an explanation of the reason for terminating services, as well as the next steps for the client. Ideally, a face-to-face termination session would be preferred, but this is dependent on the circumstance. For example, a face-to-face or in-person discussion is not advisable or practical if the client poses a safety risk to the professional, if scheduling a face-to-face meeting is not possible despite the provision of multiple scheduling options, or due to the nature of virtual care.
- Providing the client with adequate notice of termination of services, so that the client has sufficient time to arrange for service continuity before services are discontinued. Determination of adequate or reasonable notice will require careful consideration of several factors, including the client's diagnosis, risk of adverse outcomes, the availability of alternative service providers, and the regulated member's professional judgement, to name a few.
- In the event of sudden and unpredicted situations causing practice closure and termination of services (e.g., sudden serious illness, public health emergencies), the regulated member is still expected to make efforts to inform clients of service discontinuation and implement discharge planning as soon as is practical.
- Documenting the reason for the decision to discontinue services, as well as all discharge planning activities.

### Unethical Service Termination

NOTE: It is considered unethical to deny or discontinue services on a discriminatory basis. This includes protected grounds under the [Alberta Human Rights Commission](#) (e.g., race, religious beliefs, gender identity or expression, age, source of income, etc.). While mental and physical disabilities are also considered protected grounds, it is not unethical for a regulated member to discontinue services for a client with a disability if the SLP or audiologist lacks the necessary competence for working with the client's particular disability.

