**Level 5 Case Review Example Written by Mark Hartshorn**

**This case review is intended to demonstrate the style of writing required,**

**rather than to be an example of best practice.**

1. **Context and boundaries of work**

I work as an integrative therapist in private practice from my home in a suburb of a large city. I find that being outside the city centre an advantage, as clients comment on how they like to come out of the city for their appointments. I employ a supervisor and have supervision every month in line with BACP requirements. I am a registered member of BACP. My clients refer themselves to me for counselling and I see some clients under an EAP program. I advertise online via The Counselling Directory, but most clients come through recommendations.

I let clients know that I work from home before we meet, as some may prefer not to meet in my home. This also demonstrates commitment to working with client autonomy as I am allowing the client to make a choice. Clients access my therapy room on the first floor, without having to go through or into other rooms. I have a separate toilet for their use. This helps manage potential boundary difficulties as clients are not seeing private parts of my home. I am aware that for clients with mobility problems, a first-floor practice is not ideal, but for clients who cannot manage stairs, I offer a home visit service, in line with the ethical principle of justice.

K, who is 21 (the subject of this case review) presented in the first session, with anxiety and seemed to be seriously uncomfortable. He seemed to phase in and out of awareness and this meant contracting was difficult. I wanted to make sure that he was present enough to understand the contract and to take part in the negotiation of it. I let K say a little of why he was with me. He shared that he had been sent by his parents. Through a little discussion, K appeared to become more grounded in the room with me and I began to go through the contract with him. I went through the way I work, confidentiality limitations (trustworthy), ending our work together, meeting between sessions and explained my fees and cancellation policies. I am keen to engage clients in the contracting process so that it does not sound like a list of rules and so that they feel as though their opinions and needs matter to me. K agreed with what had been explained and said that he didn’t think he wanted to add anything to it. I offered him the chance to do so at any point in the future. I like to offer clients the chance to set goals for the work and, so I asked K what he would like to be different if we were sat together on our last session, rather than our first. This led K to explain that he wanted to be happier and do something he could be proud of. After some exploration we managed to narrow down K’s goals to identifying the triggers for his depression and exploring the kinds of things that he might be able to do, that would help him to be “proud of himself”. In negotiating a contract and exploring K’s goals, I believe that I was offering him choice as to how we would work together and helped him to identify what he wanted to get out of our work. These are important features of a first session for me, as I am working within the client’s best interest’s non-maleficence) and am putting him at the centre of the work (autonomy).

1. **Assessment/diagnosis**

I use CORE 34 as part of my assessment process. I find that this helps to monitor client outcomes, and gives a snapshot of the severity of client’s problems at the start of the work as well as the level of risk regarding suicide, harm to others etc. K was happy to complete the form, in fact he seemed to quite enjoy it. I think that this helped to ground him and bring him into the here and now, during our first session. I also asked if K about previous experience of counselling, history of mental health problems, any diagnosis that has been made and medication.

I am an integrative counsellor and use a relational, psycho-spiritual model that explores connection between aspects of self, mind, body, soul and emotion. This model (The Connections Model) of wellbeing serves as an integration model too. It informed my use of the Gestalt concept of contact and withdrawal, to assess how well K made contact with me and his feelings and to get a sense of the unfinished business he may be experiencing as a result of interruptions to his previous experiences. I used CBT to identify any core beliefs as these greatly affect wellbeing and the relationship between myself and my client.

K seemed to struggle to make contact with me and to his feelings and body. There was a brief connection to the spiritual when he spoke of his Christian belief. I assessed K as being in a state of disconnectedness in terms of body and emotion and saw that he favoured his mind. This was evident in his enjoyment of completing the CORE 34 form. I saw that he enjoyed the activity of completing the form, more than talking to me. He had a lot of unfinished business and unmet needs from his childhood as he spoke of how his parents favoured his younger brother and that he felt very angry about this. I identified that due to his religious beliefs, it was hard for him to admit to his anger. I noticed that his core beliefs seemed to link to not being good enough.

In terms of CPCAB service levels I felt that K was most certainly in need of support at service level B and possibly C too. It became clear that he had never really coped well with the world and his problems and that he hadn’t received loving support from his parents, leaving him anxious and unsure as he strived to “get it right”. I was confident that he would benefit from the opportunity to find out more about himself, express his anger and other feelings and make connections between his childhood and work more deeply with the unfinished business regarding his childhood experiences.

On reflection, I think that my assessment of K was effective and led to me feeling that I was able to work with him and his problems. However, I wonder now, if I could have spent a little longer exploring K’s apparent lack of connection with me and I wonder if I had checked this out with him, then it may have provided additional information regarding his feelings about being with me which could have been useful in our work, particularly as a relational approach lies at the heart of my approach and he had been sent by his parents. Additionally, having noticed K’s apparent enjoyment at doing the CORE form, I could have asked if he might prefer activities in our sessions, rather than talking, as a way of doing some work, while developing the relationship.

1. **Awareness of diversity issues**

I refer to D’Andrea’s and Daniels RESPECTFUL Cube as a reminder of the level and depth of potential difference between myself and my clients. Referring to this model, helps me to create a blueprint of differences between us, which helps me to identify areas for exploration in the work with the client. The model helped me to identify that age, social class and religious belief as big differences. I am mid 40’s, my client early 20’s. I consider myself to be from a working-class background, K was from a more affluent background and he is a Christian, while I consider myself to be spiritual but not religious.

The age difference was something I had to be particularly aware of. I know from personal development work that I can over identify with young men. I can project onto them the feelings and needs I had at a similar age. This leads me to want to be over involved and offer advice and solutions to rescue them from their pain. This was definitely something I had hoped for in my early 20’s. This projection, very familiar to me was present in my work with K. I noticed that at times I would offer suggestions and try to “make him feel better” quicker than his process was ready for.

At times, K would project onto me “expert” and would look to me for answers and solutions. This was difficult for me as his need for answers led fuelled my projection and led me to work even harder to find the answers for K. In one session, when I was struggling to find an answer to a problem he was struggling with K said, “you and I both know this is not working”

I worked with this by taking the opportunity to say that I felt paternal towards him at times and that this led me to want to find answers for him that I just didn’t have. I shared that I put pressure on myself to make him feel better and come up with solutions and my worry was that this meant I was not helping him to find his own answers and that it may seem as though I am like his parents. K seemed to really appreciate this honesty and led to us agreeing that we would both name the process when we each became aware of it. He agreed to say when he was looking for me to have an answer and I agreed to share when I was feeling pressured to answer. This proved to be a useful agreement as the relationship became more congruent. The hidden projections were brought into the open and I believe that our relationship was strengthened as a result. I believe that K was able to see me for who I was, rather than as a parent, who would tell him what to do to solve his problems, something he was painfully too familiar with in the relationship with his parents.

1. **Development of the therapeutic relationship**

The relationship was difficult to establish due to K’s struggle to make contact with me initially. I missed that he feared judgment and to be told he was getting it wrong. Something that he had experienced frequently in his family and at school and university. As I’ve mentioned, my implicit need to make it better for him, meant that I was caught up in my own projections for a while. I have no doubt that this left K feeling alone in the work and struggling as there would have been a lack of empathy from me to him due to me over identifying and projecting.

It was when K said that “you and I both know this isn’t working” that something changed in our relationship and work. His comment, led to the start of a more congruent relationship between us. Together we developed trust. I let go of the need to fix and instead moved into an empathic understanding of K and his world, rather than being lost in mine. The discussions between us became open, honest and more real. This meant that agreements could be reached about how we might work together in a way where he didn’t need me to find solutions and I didn’t need to fix. I noticed that the contact with me that K had found it difficult to establish at the start of our work, began to strengthen. Eye contact was often held, this seemed a clear indicator that he was beginning to be present and in relationship with me.

The model I use to integrate the theories I use in my practice is The Connections model. This places relationship at the heart of the work and guides me to work with Person Centred concepts to develop and maintain the working alliance. I use Rogers core conditions to create a relationship in which K felt accepted and valued. I believe that for any therapeutic work to be successful, there must be an empathic, non-judgmental relationship that the client can feel and trust. In my work with K, it seemed vital to move the relationship into a congruent one as soon as possible and it was K’s comment that led to the exploration of the implicit processes around projection that was taking place between us. With hindsight, it may have been helpful, if I had brought the same problem to the work, but maybe it was because the relationship did feel safe enough to K, that he felt able to share his frustration with me.

Using the Gestalt concept of contact and withdrawal really helped to develop the relationship once it moved into a more congruent one as it enabled me to notice and point out when K was withdrawing from me, communicating what I noticed about his withdrawal, in an empathic and understanding way, I believe went a long way to us developing a very trusting and safe relationship that I think it is fair to say, we both enjoyed being in.

**5. Use of Self Awareness**

As I have already outlined, for me, the biggest challenge was to move away from over identifying with K. A lot of what he brought to the work, reminded me of myself at his age. I know that I can over identify with young male clients as in them, I can often see the younger me. K brought the lack of support, love and care from his parents, that I too had experienced, and this led me to want to make it better for him and offer solutions and fixes. I am sure that this was not helpful to K and prevented the therapeutic relationship from being a congruent one due to my projections and over identification. As I struggled to think of things that would make it better for him, he may well have felt alone in the room, misunderstood and could have been re-experiencing the same as he did at home, where parents continually told him what to do and became frustrated with him when he didn’t do it.

In personal counselling I have learned to meet the needs of my damaged child self and have learned both the triggers for him and what to do to self sooth when he is triggered. K’s words about “it not working” were the trigger for me to move back into a more congruent way of interacting and away from projection and over identification, both with my damaged child self and with K. I have learned that younger me was desperate for someone to make it better for him, to care, love and support him and give him the answers and guidance he needed to help him cope with life. I have learned that the adult part of me can help younger me when these familiar thoughts and needs arise in the present. Awareness of this helped me to realise that at the heart of my projections and over identification, was my hurt younger self, I was able to take care of him and meet his needs, which left me free to work more effectively with K. I used my own process to help K find his own adult self and although this was a slow process, it was successful. I remembered how long it took me to develop a loving and healthy adult part of me that could take care of the younger me when triggered and this allowed me to be patient with K and his process and take things at his pace, rather than rushing him to get there quickly, which of course was more about alleviating my distress than his.

The work I had done in personal counselling, was invaluable in supporting me and the work I did with K as it provided a reference point and affirmation that the process, although slow, was more likely to be successful, if I remained in adult and allowed K to develop a relationship with his adult self. A lot of what I had experienced in personal counselling, informed the process that took place between us and for K. I remembered the loving, gentle support my therapist offered me and how invaluable I had found it and strived to offer this to K.

**6. Theory Underpinning Skills**

The Connections model suggests that a person will enjoy a greater sense of wellbeing if they are connected mentally, emotionally, physically and spiritually. The model also informs choice of theoretical intervention from Person Centred to develop a therapeutic relationship, Gestalt (to work with body and emotion), CBT ( to work with core beliefs and negative automatic thoughts) and Transpersonal (to work with the soul) In my work with K, I was aware that he was anxious and that this seemed to stem from a core belief (CBT) of “I am wrong” and negative automatic thoughts like “I have to get it right” and “ I must please others” I felt that it would be helpful, given how much K connected to his mind, rather than other parts of himself, to begin by exploring his core beliefs and the thoughts that stemmed from these, while the relationship was being developed and trust built. K was angry with his parents but had been unable to connect to his anger as his core beliefs and negative automatic thoughts made it difficult for him to admit to or express his anger as the messages he had received from his parents and faith led him to believe that anger was wrong and that it would be displeasing to others if he were angry.

If K was to enjoy a great sense of wellbeing, it seemed important that I help him to establish connection to the different parts of himself and his anger. Using UPR and Empathy, along with congruence, I invited K to tell me about his anger towards his parents, careful to pave a way towards connecting with it, that would feel safe and free from the judgement K feared. Over time, K was able to connect to his anger which he felt in the pit of his stomach. He had managed to connect his thoughts, to his emotion and body. I use Gestalt to work with emotion and body and as is often the case, unfinished business due to interruptions to the cycle of experience had caused K to disown his anger. I offered empty chair to facilitate an exercise where K could say to his parents, how angry he felt and how they had failed him. This was a crucial development in our work as for the first time K had been able to connect this his anger, express it and not be judged for doing so. I believe that the anxiety K had presented with was caused by a failing to act on or express the excitement felt within his organism (express his anger). He had managed to complete a Gestalt and move away from a fixed one, by completing some of his unfinished business.

The work with the spiritual proved useful in helping K to accept his anger and his holistic self too. By drawing on Transpersonal concepts, I offered K a visualisation to meet with Jesus (as he is a Christian) and get Jesus’ take on anger. This seemed helpful to K as it led to K remembering Jesus getting angry with the money lenders. This helped K to reframe anger and begin to accept it as being normal and ok. K had been able to connect to the four aspects of self, mind, body, soul and emotion and seemed to enjoy a greater sense of wellbeing as a result.

I wonder if I had inadvertently colluded with K’s implicit need for an expert in offering some of the interventions I did, even though they seemed to be effective. Perhaps I could have helped him to become his own expert more. I offered most of the interventions, rather than inviting him to think of a way that might have been useful for himself. With hindsight, it could have been greatly beneficial to give K a greater sense of autonomy by sitting back and allowing him time and space to find ways of expressing his anger to his parents. I feel that whilst overall the work helped K to feel less anxious and complete some unfinished business around anger, more could have been achieved in terms of developing his autonomy and connection to his own answers.

**7. Use of Supervision**

I regularly took K to supervision in the early stages of our work. I explored with my supervisor how I was struggling with K and how I felt under pressure to find solutions and answers quickly. I can see now that my supervisor was offering me the core conditions of her purely person-centred modality, while supporting me to find my own answers. There were times that this frustrated me as I was desperately in need of ways of working with K that would alleviate his distress. It seemed that there was a parallel process at work. My sessions with my supervisor mirrored the sessions with K. K’s implicit need for answers from me was being played out in the supervisory relationship with me wanting answers from her.

It took a while for me to come up with the answer, with the support of my supervisor and this was during one session where my frustration with her seemed to reach it’s peak. I remember thinking to myself how this was not helping and how I would be better off looking for a supervisor with more experience. I felt unsupported by her. I didn’t share this with her and I wish I had now, as again, this appeared to be a parallel process. I feel that our work might have benefitted greatly from me sharing my thoughts out loud, but I didn’t want to upset her or hurt her feelings. I believe that the work with K might have benefitted from me sharing my honest thoughts with her, as it may have led to the realisation happening sooner.

 The answer came to me as the supervisor held the space and I quietly protested. The penny dropped, she wasn’t doing anything, just listening, holding, supporting and not colluding with my need for answers and solutions. This insight enabled me to see the obvious (something I can often need from supervision) that in colluding with K’s implicit need for answers I wasn’t helping him. I would serve him better if I provided space for him to find his own.

I would be lying if I said that I was able to apply this insight wholeheartedly in my work with K. One reason for this being that I work in an integrative way (one that is slightly more directive) and my supervisor is purely person-centred. However, the insight did enable me to slow down the process and it took the pressure off me to find answers and solutions. I think it enabled me to trust the process a little more and I noticed in my work with K, I was able to share with him how I felt under pressure at times to find answers and the discussion we had around this led to a much more congruent relationship emerging between us both.