



Time and Boundaries: Handling Emotional Clients Without Burning Out

As therapists, we know that part of what makes our work so powerful is the **time and space** we give our clients. We listen deeply, hold space for emotions, and create an environment where clients feel safe to release what's been building inside.

But sometimes, that generosity of time can become a challenge — especially when clients open up emotionally *before* their treatment even begins.

This topic came up recently during a **Tea & Business Clinic** inside my Academy, when one of my lovely “owlets” shared an experience with a client who became emotional before their session. She gave her time to listen, but then had a practical question:

- 👉 What happens when this emotional release eats into the treatment time?
- 👉 Do you still give them their full session?
- 👉 Do you charge for that time if no treatment happens?
- 👉 How do you balance compassion with your own time boundaries?

These are important questions for every therapist to consider.

The Scenario

You've set aside an hour for a treatment. A new or returning client arrives and, before you've even started, they open up. Tears flow. Stories pour out. You give them the space to talk, to be heard — something they may not get elsewhere.

If you've got no clients booked afterwards, it might not feel like an issue. You can extend their time, give the treatment, and adjust your office hours. But if you have a full clinic day ahead... suddenly, you're faced with a difficult choice.

Do you:

- Shorten the treatment?
 - Let the session run over (impacting your next client)?
 - Ask them to rebook for another time?
 - Charge for the time spent listening, even if no treatment happens.
-



Why This Matters

As therapists, it's in our nature to care. Many of us are natural listeners and empathic space-holders. But **our time is valuable**, and emotional conversations *are still part of the session*.

If you don't set clear boundaries, you may find yourself:

- Consistently running over schedule 🕒
- Losing income by giving away unpaid time
- Feeling emotionally drained after sessions
- Struggling to maintain balance between compassion and business structure

Practical Considerations

1. **Communicate Boundaries Early**
Consider adding a gentle note to your **welcome pack**, website, or FAQs explaining how consultations and treatment time work — especially for first sessions.
2. **Clarify First Appointments**
Let new clients know in their booking confirmation that their first appointment may last longer to include a consultation, e.g. "Please allow up to 90 minutes for your first session."
3. **Prepare for Emotional Releases**
Recognise that emotional releases happen — sometimes before, during, or after treatment. Think about how you want to handle this *before* it happens, so you're not deciding on the spot.
4. **Create Policies You're Comfortable With**
Every therapist will handle this differently. Some may allow the conversation time to count as part of the session; others may charge for time spent, even if treatment doesn't go ahead. The key is consistency and clarity.
5. **Protect Your Energy and Schedule**
Not all emotional sharing is therapeutic release — some clients become "time vampires," regularly using extra time without taking steps to change their situation. Boundaries help you protect both your schedule and your wellbeing.

Your Turn

How do *you* handle emotional clients and time boundaries?
Do you have a policy on your website or in your welcome pack?
Would you charge for time spent listening, or reschedule the treatment?



This is a thoughtful, nuanced topic — and it's worth having a plan in place before it arises. Share your thoughts in the [The Business Side of Therapy Facebook](#) Group or in your therapist community — your experience could help someone else navigate this beautifully.