The Unexpected Caller

written by Richard Leslie | May 24, 2016

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… Suppose you are counseling a mother and her child. Suppose further that you are aware that the father/husband (uninvolved in the therapy) knows that you are the therapist. One day the husband/father unexpectedly calls you and says that he has something to tell you which is very important to the work you are doing with his wife and daughter. After he identifies himself, he asks that you agree not to reveal the fact that he called or that he provided any information. Generally, you should be quick (even if you must interrupt) to tell him, if you choose to converse at all, that you cannot and will not promise confidentiality and that you don't keep secrets from your clients. You should make clear that you are free to share any and all information with your patient, as you see fit. You should deliver this basic message in words that you are comfortable with. This is often enough to cause such a caller not to share any information with you.

Were you were to promise confidentiality, you would be in a position where you were keeping a secret from your client, the one to whom you owe a duty of loyalty and trust. Such situations can be very messy, so you should do your very best to remember – be prepared for the unexpected call. Much of the time you will not even want to acknowledge that you are treating a particular patient or client. In fact, it is generally a good practice not even to acknowledge the fact that you are not treating a particular patient when that is the case.