



## Innovations in Counseling (Part 13 Session 3)

### The Gator vs The Salamander: Effective Self Care Strategies for Helping Professionals

Webinar Follow-Up Question and Answer Session with Jason Branch, PhD, NCC, ACS, LPC

**Question from Anonymous:** I'm wondering if you could speak a little to the ways in which *yes* boundaries with time, and the ways in which aspects of access/privilege, etc. shift what our 24 hours look like. For example, I would say that not having a car and having to take public transit shifts our access to how we use our time. Yes, there are choices within that, and I think that's part of what I'm asking; how do we/what can we do to examine and set boundaries within some of the situational/contextual constraints we experience?

**Answer from Presenter:** Your time is your most valuable currency. My recommendation would be to start by identifying what truly matters most—personally and professionally—and what no longer deserves priority. We all have the same 24 hours, but how we invest those hours determines our impact and influence.

Time management challenges usually point back to three things: boundaries, resources, and decisions. And as someone who leads, teaches, and transforms, your *yes* carries weight. The reality is, you don't owe 100% of yourself to everyone and everything. You get to choose what percentage of your energy you allocate—and that choice shapes your sustainability and your legacy.

Start practicing the power of *strategic reduction*. Give less of you to what drains you and more of you to what builds and aligns with who you are becoming. Strengthen your boundaries. Use *no* as a tool of protection, not explanation. *No* is a complete sentence—and when you're operating at a high level, honoring your *no* is one of the highest forms of self-care.

**Question from Anonymous:** How do you get better at not taking your work home and not allowing yourself to get caught up in your clients' problems?

**Answer from Presenter:** Establishing and maintaining healthy personal and professional boundaries isn't just something you do—it's a leadership skillset, and like any skill, it takes intention, reps, and refinement over time. As a Key Person of Influence, balance doesn't happen by accident. It's created through consistent self-care, emotional discipline, and a commitment to not carry what isn't yours.

Learning to leave work at work is part of your personal growth journey. It's a mindset shift that says, *"I am more than my outcomes, and I am not defined by the lived experiences of those I serve."* That's not detachment—it's wisdom.

Our clients are resilient. We have to trust the process and trust ourselves. The work we do within the session is valuable and sacred—but outside of that space, we release control. That's where boundaries honor both the client's autonomy and our own humanity. The transformation we offer doesn't require us to be on call emotionally 24/7—it requires us to be present, powerful, and whole when it matters most.

**Question from Anonymous:** Ethics are really hard to navigate because I never want to do the wrong thing. I don't want to hurt any clients or give the wrong advice.

**Answer from Presenter:** As a therapist, your role is not to give advice—it's to empower your clients to discover their own answers. Our job isn't to direct their lives, but to *guide* their process. When we slip into advice-giving, we unintentionally position ourselves as the solution, and that can create dependency. If the advice works, the client may start relying on you instead of building internal trust. If it doesn't work, it can damage the therapeutic relationship and your credibility.

The truth is, your power isn't in solving their problems—it's in holding space, asking the best questions, and using your clinical skills, theory, authenticity, and personality to walk beside them. Be real. Be present. Be skilled. That's more than enough.

When it comes to ethics, it's rarely black and white. There's nuance, and every clinician might approach ethical concerns differently depending on values, training, and context. The key is to *always do the best you can with what you have* and to lean into your clinical community for supervision, mentorship, and perspective. You're not meant to do this alone.

Here's a guiding question I live by: "If this decision ended up on the front page of the New York Times, would I be okay with it?" If the answer is *yes*, trust your gut, and as long as you can validate your decision, make the best one you can. If it's *no* or even *maybe*—pause, reflect, get support, and find a better way forward.

This work comes with risk—but we have the power to increase or decrease that risk based on how we show up. Trust yourself. Stay grounded. And lead with integrity.